

Women in Arabia from 500 – 650 CE :

Their Role in Tribal Conflict from Both Social and Religious Perspectives

Ginette Anderson

Thesis Presented for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Arabic and Middle Eastern Studies

University of Edinburgh

1998



Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis has been written by me the undersigned and does not represent the work of any other person.

Table of Contents.

Abstract	i
Abbreviations	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Transliteration Scheme.	iv
Chapter One.	
Introductory Remarks and Literature Review	1-38
Chapter Two.	
Early Arabia: Aspects of the Lives of Women	39-71
Chapter Three.	
Women at War : Supporters and Leaders	72-120
Chapter Four.	
Religious Environment of Arabia before Islam	121-156
Chapter Five.	
The Cult of al-ʿUzzā	157-221
Chapter Six.	
The Religious Role of Women in Battle	222-272
Conclusion	273-278
Figure I	
Bibliography.	

Abstract.

The thesis examines the role of women in Arabia in the period 500- 650 CE during tribal conflict from both social and religious perspectives. The study draws on historical texts, Biblical and Islamic religious works, literature and poetry with appropriate use of archaeological material.

Chapter One is the introduction, discussing methodology and source materials. The thesis is then divided into two parts. The first part deals with the social role of women in war, beginning in chapter two with a discussion of their position in tribal society. Chapter three focuses on warfare specifically with the participation of women in war as a social function including leadership roles. The second part examines the role of women in the cultic life of the tribe and the religious aspect of warfare. Chapter four defines the role of women the pagan cults . Chapter five deals with the cult of al -‘Uzzā noting specifically her nature as a warrior deity and the implications this has for warfare. Chapter six discusses the religious aspect of war, concentrating specifically on the ritual function of women in battle. The conclusion sums up the results of the research and links the two aspects of women's participation arena of tribal conflict.

Abbreviations...

AJSL	American Journal of Semitic Language and Literature
BSOAS	Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies
EI ²	Encyclopaedia of Islam, new edition
EJ	Encyclopaedia Judaica
ERE	Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics
IJMES	International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies
JAL	Journal of Arabic Literature
JAOS	Journal of the American Oriental Society
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JNES	Journal of Near Eastern Studies
JSAI	Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam
JRAS	Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society
JSEHO	Journal of the Social and Economic History of the Orient
JSS	Journal of Semitic Studies
PSAS	Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies
SJA	South-western Journal of Anthropology
ZDMG	Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft

Acknowledgments

I must acknowledge the assistance of the staff of the Islamic and Middle Eastern studies department of Edinburgh University, all of whom have made some contribution to this study from my undergraduate studies to the present. I must especially acknowledge the guidance of my supervisors. Special thanks too to Lel Scobie.

I also wish to extend my gratitude to the following who have been of great help academically with suggestions and editing of the text:

Dr IKA Howard	Dr Īhāb al-Sakkūt	James Lehmann
Dr E. Scheinberg	Niall Christie	Amjad Shah

I must give personal thanks to the following people for their support both financially and in other ways:

My parents and their partners	Rabbi David and Mrs Alit Sedley
Darren Silver	Julian Goodman

Transliteration.

The scheme of transliteration used has been that of the Encyclopedia of Islam, with the following alterations:

ق = q

ج = j

Place names and words with familiar English renderings have been left unchanged, e.g. Mecca, Islam, though some have been transliterated, e.g. Qur'ān. All personal names have been transliterated.

Chapter One

Introductory Remarks and Literature Review.

Aims and Objectives of this Dissertation.

The period 500-650 in Arabia was one of transition in Arabian society. The principal objective of this work is to explore the development of the roles of women in Arabia during this time through an examination of their place in the area of tribal conflict. This enquiry is from two perspectives, the societal function of women in warfare situations and what this demonstrated about their place in the social matrix, and also their functions in cult life and how this led them into a pivotal role in major inter-tribal battles.

This introductory chapter will discuss the temporal and geographical limitations, methodological framework and review source materials both primary and secondary. Also, a discussion of the terms pre-Islamic and Jāhiliyya will be included and their validity questioned. The use of these terms is an important question in the study of this particular time frame in Arab history and has implications for the early Islamic period.

Chapter two presents an overview of the lives of women in this period. The purpose of this discussion is to explode the myth that women were second-class members of society in this period and to demonstrate that they had rights and responsibilities within the tribe and were active members of the community.

The next chapter deals with warfare from a social perspective. This will demonstrate that women actively participated in conflict situations. Data will be presented to demonstrate that women were active both in the accepted experience

of war for women as supporters of the men and also their occasional leadership roles. What can be extrapolated from this about women in society will be considered.

In chapter four the religious life of the period will be briefly surveyed, with an emphasis on the offices women held within the different cults.

The discussion then moves on in the fifth chapter to investigate in some depth one particular cult, that of the goddess al-ʿUzzā, who was one of the most important deities of pagan Arabia as a whole, and especially to the Quraysh tribe, of which Muḥammad was a member. This chapter will describe and discuss the cult of al-ʿUzzā in the environs of Mecca, putting her into a Near Eastern context. From that some conclusions about the nature of al-ʿUzzā and her function in Arabian society will emerge. Included in this chapter will be some consideration of the Banāt Allah¹, especially the goddess Allāt². Examination of the close association between al-ʿUzzā and Allāt is of some importance, not least because it questions the traditional views about the Banāt Allah. The discussion in the following chapter includes a consideration of the implications of this association for certain women in warfare.

The sixth chapter addresses warfare and women's participation therein with particular reference to their religious roles. This chapter will also tie together the preceding chapters and will demonstrate the links between the two strands of this thesis.

¹ A triad of goddesses thought to have been worshipped in Arabia c. sixth century CE.

² One of the above mentioned three goddesses known as the Banāt Allah.

Temporal and Geographical Boundaries.

Although material for this thesis is drawn from a wide range of sources from ancient Assyria to twentieth century Syria, the actual focus of this discussion centres on a much narrower time period and geographical area.

The temporal boundaries have been set at 500 - 650 CE, which covers the late 'pre-Islamic' and the early Islamic periods until approximately the end of the Rashidun caliphate. This choice is not wholly arbitrary, as it mostly conforms with that set out by Nicholson in his *Literary History of the Arabs* as the pre-Islamic period for literature with an additional thirty years³.

The geographical area covered is the Hejaz, which stretches from the coastal plain of the Red Sea to the Najd plateau and includes the cities of Mecca and Medina. Material outwith these areas is included to demonstrate either continuity from earlier civilisations or contemporary resonances found in the Arab world.

Methodological Questions and Background.

One of the main themes running through the discussion is that of continuity of practice from the ancient Near East into late antiquity Arabia and then into early Islam.

There are two strands of continuity to consider in this work. The first is the continuity of practice from the ancient to the late antique world and secondly from that into Islamic civilisation. In spite of an increasing acceptance of the idea of gradual development Islamic civilisation, generally the period before Muḥammad began his career as prophet is considered inherently different to the period after.

³ R. A. Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs* (1930) pxxiv. He splits Arabic literature into three sections, Sabaeen and Himyarite (800 BCE - 500 CE), pre-Islamic (500 CE- 622 CE) and 'Muhammadan' (622 CE- present day).

The time before Islam seems to be viewed as totally separate with little relevance other than to demonstrate the poor social conditions of Arabia making it ripe for the dynamic social force that was Islam⁴. Lewis made a point similar to this when he noted the general lack of attention paid to the civilisations which preceded Islam in any discussion of Islamic history⁵.

It appears to have been long recognised that certain elements of pre-existing ritual became incorporated into Islam in a slightly different form to make the new faith more accessible. For example, it has been an unchallenged 'fact' for many years that the various components of the Ḥājj are largely non-Islamic, i.e. attributed to other beliefs in the period before Muḥammad's prophethood⁶. The development of a recognisably Islamic society began some time before and concluded a great deal after the life of Muḥammad⁷.

Morony assesses the degree of change which actually took place as a result of the conquest of Iraq in the 7th century. He observed that, until recently, there were two approaches in the study of Islamic civilisation. The first of which attributed everything to external factors and older cultural traditions, especially Judeo-Christian. According to Morony, this approach was the favoured attitude of the European scholars who based concepts of history on Graeco-Roman models, and was an attempt to make Islam acceptable to the West by imposing a cultural model of a 'civilised' society. The second approach was equally defective, assuming that all aspects of Islamic civilisation were indigenous to Islam and based on the religion itself. This stressed the Muslim cultural self-sufficiency of not needing therefore not

⁴ For example, W. Montgomery-Watt's *Muḥammad at Mecca* (1993) and *Muḥammad at Medina* (1981) (Also in the 'compilation' of the two, *Muḥammad, Prophet and Statesman*, (1961). Watt's theories on the rise of Islam will be noted further in chapter four.

⁵ Lewis, *The Middle East* (1995), see the introductory remarks.

⁶ For an example of this discussion, see F.E. Peters, *The Hajj* (1994)p. 22 and 31.

⁷ Hodgson, *Venture of Islam*, (1974) vol. I p104.

ever having had, to adopt features of any other society. This viewpoint was especially popular among Muslims in the late 20th century. Morony described both approaches as problematic, the first because it ignores any originality in Islam, and the latter because it refuses to admit historical continuity⁸.

An important point in this examination of continuity is that the influences of outside cultures and civilisations are not the greatest parts of the question. While certainly some development has occurred, in perception if not in actuality, the deviation from that which may be considered the western Semitic basis of Arab life at this time is the area where some of the most useful points for interpretation of the period can be found. It is questionable how much influence outside forces would have had on the peninsular Arabs. Tribal life was based on an adherence to tradition, and even in areas where there was daily contact between different cultures in the urban centres of the region, interest in the ways of others was limited to particular events rather than a broad exchange of ideas⁹.

Of course the possibility of a gradual filtration of ideas must be considered, but on the whole it seems more likely that if there appears to be a degree of agreement between a Biblical practice and an early Arab one it emerged more out of a common western Semitic basis than out of a strong Jewish influence in peninsular Arabia¹⁰. The question of the Judeo-Christian influence on Muḥammad and Islam is a

⁸ Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquests* (1984), p5.

⁹ Dūrī, *The Rise of Historical Writing Among the Arabs*, translated by Lawrence Conrad, (1983) p20.

¹⁰ The idea that the early Arabs are more akin to the western Semitic tradition appears to be one which is well-established, given that many comparative works exist and also in the theories about the origins of the Semites, all of which are unproven, there seems to be a belief in common origins for those groups bracketed together as Western Semitic (*Arabia and the Bible*, J.A. Montgomery (1984), *Stone and Pillar Cult Among the Western Semites*, C.W.McMurray (1986), *Ancient Semitic Civilisations*, S. Moscati (1957), *Relations Between Arabs and Israelites Prior to Islam*, D.S. Margoliouth (1924), *Semitic and Hamitic Origins*, G.A.Barton (1934) to name a few).

topic not covered specifically here as it has been discussed on numerous occasions elsewhere¹¹, and has even been overplayed by some scholars as suggested in Morony's theory stated above¹². With the exception of Bravmann, the interest in the monotheistic influence from these traditions on Islam is often pursued at the expense of a full examination of the Arab religious tradition¹³. It is also not especially relevant in the question of continuity of practice, other than perhaps in the context of how Muḥammad was influenced to change an aspect of practice as a result of either tradition.

As the topic is considered primarily as part of the Western Semitic tradition, the Christian influence is not discussed in any great detail. Likewise, the possible Persian influence on either early Arab society or Islamic civilisation is not discussed.

A Reassessment of the Terms Jāhiliyya and Pre-Islamic .

A further issue which needs to be briefly addressed is the general approach to the Jāhiliyya or pre-Islamic period, and consideration is given to redefining and refining the terminology used.

Hodgson made a case in the *Venture of Islam* for the use of the terms 'Islamdom' and 'Islamicate' based on his thoughts on the implied, though false, homogeneity of so-called 'Islamic' civilisation and history¹⁴. The point he was making is that to describe a region or time as being Islamic is unfair and inaccurate as it denies the cultural and religious heterogeneity of the people concerned. His

¹¹ For example, Bernard Lewis, *The Arabs in History* (1977) and *The Middle East* (1995), also, Hourani *A History of the Islamic Peoples* (1991), Montgomery Watt *Muḥammad at Mecca* (1993) and *Muḥammad at Medina* (1956), Richard Bell's *Introduction to the Qur'ān* (1977) also gives often very Judeo-Christian interpretations of the sūras.

¹² Hodgson, in the *Venture of Islam*, vol. I p26-30, discusses the attitude of Christian historians towards Islam and the recognition of personal cultural bias.

¹³ *The Spiritual Background of Early Islam*, (1972).

¹⁴ Hodgson, vol. I p57-60.

belief was that the term 'Islamic' should only be applied to matters of Islam as a religion, rather than using the term as a blanket description of a predominantly Muslim environment. Instead he proposed the use of the term 'Islamicate', to refer to cultural and historical life within such an environment, and 'Islamdom', to refer to the lands themselves as a variant on Christendom. Unfortunately it seems that Hogdson's points have not been adopted by the academic establishment.

The period referred to as the Jāhiliyya or pre-Islamic era should receive similar reconsideration because both terms carry a certain attitude implicit within them towards that which they describe. While it is perhaps necessary to categorise broad time periods for ease of reference, this does not mean that the terms need to be unnecessarily prejudicial, which it may be suggested both of the above are.

Both Goldziher¹⁵ and Istzusu¹⁶ have discussed the nature and use of the term Jāhiliyya, and both appear to have concluded that it referred to a state of mind, an attitude or set of cultural values, rather than an actual historical time. Both scholars also proposed that while it seems superficially to mean that it meant ignorance of Islam, it meant that those of the Jāhiliyya were ignorant of stability and control, allowing hot-headedness and revenge to rule their lives. The term seems to mean that all practices emanating from this period are to be viewed as wrong, bad or inferior to the new vision offered by Islam. The very fact that this term is used in such a disapproving manner by medieval Muslim historians and theologians should mean that it is unsuitable for a less slanted study.

The word Jāhiliyya has passed into historical terminology to refer to anything which was prior to the life and prophecy of Muḥammad and is interchangeable with

¹⁵ *Muslim Studies*, Appendix I (1971).

¹⁶ *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an*, (1966).

the English term pre-Islamic. However, the latter term is also lacking, and has a similarly negative effect as the term Jāhiliyya, if not for the same reasons. There is no implication of negativity intrinsic in the phrase, it appears to refer to that which was prior to Islam. The term is used in such a way as to imply that what existed before Islam had no inherent life of its own, and thus the period is only discussed in reference to and in comparison with Islam. One might compare it to the way that European history refers to the Dark Ages coming before the Renaissance, implying that the earlier period contained nothing of historical significance. Indeed, Della Vida referred to the period between the end of the Roman conquests and Muḥammad as 'the dark ages' on one occasion¹⁷, which again appears to devalue the cultural and historical events which took place at this time. It is of course problematic to suggest that people during these less glamorous eras failed to develop and progress either socially or culturally. The terminology still seems to colour the attitude people have towards these temporal demarcations. This said, the term pre-Islamic still has some currency, and is a useful term when placing events in a general context, but it must be recognised to have some cultural implications. As discussed earlier in this chapter, a defined point in time for the genesis of a new subculture of the type usually required by historians is a false notion as there can never be one specific time. However, as temporal demarcations are a necessary evil of historical inquiry, it should be attempted to make them as unbiased as possible.

Therefore, a reconsideration of the terminology used when referring to this time in the history of the Arabs may be proposed. Only once this has been done can this important cultural and historical period be taken on its own merit and have its

¹⁷ G.L. Della Vida 'Notes on Pre-Islamic Arabia' p41 in *The Arab Heritage* ed. N. Faris (1946).

own history without having to be seen as a mere stepping stone to a greater civilisation¹⁸.

Lyall applied the adjective "ancient" to the poetry from this time, however this seems to be stretching too far into the past¹⁹. It is too closely linked to the truly ancient Arabs who appear in the histories of Greece and Rome, such as the Nabataeans, or the monarchies of South Arabia²⁰. "Early Arab" may be suitable, as it suggests a point that it is neither medieval, nor ancient. Thus, for want of a better term at this time, early Arab is the one which will be used in the majority of this dissertation.

The history of women in this period has been touched upon in several studies, though usually very much in passing. Women in Arabia before Islam were usually portrayed as either having an exalted position or a lowly one. This polarisation seems to have been produced by writers, who aimed to either legitimise or criticise Islam. It should be noted however, that most writers today seem to concur that the often low position of women in modern Muslim society is the product of later influences which are not true to the original spirit of Islam and are the result of distortion or ignorance of the Shari'a.

Sources Consulted: Arabic, Secondary and Archaeological.

Sources which deal in any detail with the early Arab world are few, therefore the available material is somewhat limited in comparison with other historical periods. At first sight it may appear as if there are numerous sources dealing with late antiquity and early Islam. However, as Humphreys rightly pointed out, those

¹⁸ This desire to treat this period in its own right does not negate the previous argument of the importance of continuity in history, it merely wishes to establish the idea of the period existing without being subordinate to another.

¹⁹ Lyall, *Ancient Arabian Poetry* (1885).

²⁰ For example, the Arabs studied by Eph'al in his 1982 book *The Ancient Arabs* refers to people living in the 9th to 5th centuries BCE.

contemporary works which remain are fragmentary and Muslim sources come with their own set of problems, which will be noted later. In short, he said "we are in trouble"²¹.

The range of historiographical works relevant to the period are essentially the earlier works²² as later historians rarely added anything of significance acquiring their knowledge from that which was already written. The works consulted for this thesis were 'early', although they were not contemporary with the events under discussion. As early Arabian culture was essentially pre-literate²³, the later written histories, which were compiled up to a century or more after the fact, were dependant on the oral tradition of Arabian society for their information. This tradition is one which the historical establishment views with some suspicion due to its apparent fluidity, and this is not unreasonable²⁴. Whilst an oral record is more susceptible to variation than that which is written, some of the scepticism towards this record must be attributed to a lack of understanding of the oral culture of the period²⁵. This uncertainty over the reliability of sources is an obstacle to the study of late antiquity and early Islamic history. As Donner put it, "the study of early Islamic history, more perhaps than most historical fields, has been plagued by uncertainties about the reliability of its written sources"²⁶. However, scholarship has devoted

²¹ R. Stephen Humphreys, *Islamic History: A Framework for Inquiry* (1991), p69.

²² Most of the Arabic sources consulted were written between 850 and 950CE.

²³ Khālidī *Arabic Thought in the Classical Period* (1994) p7. Although pre-literate there had been development of scripts in northern as well as southern Arabia (see *The Early Alphabet* Healey 1990).

²⁴ The mistrust of the earliest sources reached its height with the likes of Goldziher who viewed all traditions as unreliable.

²⁵ R. Stephen Humphreys analysed this difficulty and concluded that the orally based histories of the Arab world will only become trustworthy as a 'scientific' basis for history when they are understood. Unfortunately, he doubts that such a level of understanding is likely to be achieved (p.70).

²⁶ Donner, in his introduction to Dūrī, *The Rise of Historical Writing Among the Arabs* pviii.

some attention to addressing issues of authenticity of the early Arab material, most notably Dūrī, Humphreys and Khālidī²⁷.

From a historical perspective one of the greatest misfortunes of the oral record is the ease with which material may be lost forever. Poets used a specialist (*rāwī*) to transmit their work and ensure its purity, and the tribal lore and history were also transmitted by persons trained to do so²⁸. However, in spite of the efforts of these guardians of traditions, much of the 'literature' of the earlier periods of Arab tribal history has been lost. As Abū 'Amr ibn al-'Alā²⁹ said:

What has come down to you of the sayings of the Arabs is only the smallest portion . Had it survived in bulk, much knowledge and poetry would have reached you³⁰

This lack of extant history has been bemoaned not only by the modern scholar attempting to piece together the environment out of which Islam emerged, but also by the early Muslim historians themselves:

You ordered me to collect what has reached me of the reports of ancient Arab kings . . . I found it a difficult task to accomplish fully because of the paucity of information. . . I travelled widely among the tribes, searching out the transmitters of reports and keepers of ancient histories until I extracted all the stories of the genealogists and learnt the tales related by old men regarding their ancestors³¹

Had it not been for the rise of *Adab* one can only imagine how much more of the history and literature of the period may have been lost. The early *adībs* were

²⁷ These authors are the main contemporary, or in the case of Dūrī, near contemporary scholars working on this issue. They however, all acknowledge the comments made on this very question by the Muslim historians themselves and thus it appears that this is an issue which has been around in scholarly circles for centuries, and a solution or working paradigm has yet to be found.

²⁸ Khālidī p5.

²⁹ An early Arabic grammarian, d. c.770 / 154 CE.

³⁰ Khālidī p5.

³¹ Khālidī p6, quoting a letter from the ninth century philologist al-Aṣmā'ī to his patron.

fascinated by pagan Arabia and the ethics of the time. Among the late Umayyads and early ʿAbbāsids it was held that early Arab poetry was superior and that the Bedouin were the bastions of correct Arabic grammar and usage³². This led to a collection of all that could be recorded of the sayings of the sages, the genealogies and the histories of the tribes. It has been suggested that the "greatest achievement of early Adab was what may be called the rediscovery of the Jāhiliyya"³³. One can only imagine the horror of the religious establishment at this desire to rekindle the values and preserve the knowledge of the pagan way of life. It may be speculated that the nomadic Arab on being asked for sayings, stories and poems obligingly made them up to fulfil demand and this may be true in some cases.

The Arabic sources used in this work can be divided into three main areas, historiographical works, literature and theological exegesis. The major works used in this dissertation will now be discussed and the reliability of the available sources assessed, including any translations consulted. Later in this section secondary and European sources will be discussed, as will non-Arabic sources and archaeological material.

Historiographical Works.

A criticism which has been levelled at the early Arabs is that they had no sense of history. It has been suggested that there was no desire to commemorate events in the way one might find in a Western historical tradition³⁴, although it must

³² Khālidī p88.

³³ Khālidī p87. He attributes this interest to the restructuring of the tribes which was an important political movement of the Umayyad period.

³⁴ Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography* (1952) p18, he also notes the similar beliefs of Brockelmann and Rhodokanakis.

be noted that this in itself does not mean a lack of historicity³⁵. There was no apparent tradition of historical literature among the early Arabs, a fact which Rosenthal attributes to a lack of large scale political organisation³⁶ and Dūrī attributes more to a lack of a fixed dating system³⁷.

This must be agreed with in principle, as there is no record of there having been a literary tradition of historical writing. However, the idea that the Arabs had no sense of history whatsoever is perhaps rather an exaggeration. While it seems true that there was no written tradition, or if there ever was there is no longer any evidence, the oral tradition of the early Arabs was known to be strong and indeed a great deal of the later written histories were based on this. The northern Arabs had an oral tradition of recounting tales of their ancestors, gods and social affairs and exploits³⁸.

Two areas of historical record are generally taken from the corpus of early Arab oral traditions, the *ayyām* literature³⁹ and genealogy⁴⁰. These two facets seem to be the sum of historical literature for the Arabs, as long as one includes poetry in the category of *ayyām* to some degree as the battle days are one of the main subjects of poetic output.

³⁵ Dūrī rightly noted that until relatively recently it was customary to view western civilisation as the goal of mankind's development and thus history was always viewed from a western perspective (p3).

³⁶ Rosenthal, p18.

³⁷ Dūrī, p15.

³⁸ Dūrī, p18.

³⁹ The *ayyām* literature is concerned with the battle days of the Arabs and their raiding expeditions.

⁴⁰ Rosenthal, p19. Here Rosenthal contradicts himself to some extent. He describes the *ayyām* literature as part of an ancient Semitic style of writing also to be found in the Bible and that it does not really qualify as historical writing because that was not how it was intended. He therefore describes it as being 'more the realm of literature'(p19). However, earlier in this book he had stated that the early Arabs had had no literary activity at all and the belief that there had once been a literary tradition which had been lost or ignored was false (p18). Either the Arabs had a literary tradition or they did not, but Rosenthal seems to be unclear on that point.

It is a feature of Rosenthal's argument that he recognises the very different environmental factors in the development of Arab historiography⁴¹, but does not apply this to his actual analysis of the early material. He attempts to demonstrate that the lack of past record implies no sense of historicity at all, and that that what was recorded was merely a point of self-orientation⁴². Dūrī, likewise, correctly suggested that while the value of the *ayyām* and the genealogies is immense it has no historical perspective on its subject matter⁴³. There is no measure of objectivity whatsoever in the *ayyām* literature and very little sense of the inter-relation of events outside the immediate narrative. This is not surprising, as the function of the *ayyām* was to record the history of the tribe as the tribe wished it to be remembered rather than as it perhaps had in truth been. The *ayyām* thus was more for self-edification than any wider function. Ḥajjī Khalīfa considered the *ayyām* to be definitely historical saying, "the study of the *ayyām al-ʿarab* is a branch of learning in which one studies the momentous events and great ordeals which occurred among the Arab tribes . . . and it is appropriate that the above mentioned field of learning be placed among the branches of history"⁴⁴. A similar analysis can also be given to the genealogies which essentially existed to record tribal nobility.

It is perhaps unfair to suggest that the Arabs had no sense of history at all, rather they had no need of history in the sense in which scholarship traditionally views the subject. If the function of history is seen to be a record for the people of a given group to know who they are and their place in the world, then the level of historical development among the early Arabs was adequate for their purposes.

⁴¹ Rosenthal, p8.

⁴² Rosenthal, p19.

⁴³ Dūrī, p20.

⁴⁴ Ḥajjī Khalīfa, quoted by Dūrī p19.

Indeed, Dūrī pointed out that the accounts of their ayyām and their genealogical ties were "intimately related to the organisation, views and customs of society"⁴⁵ as it was very important to the Arabs to know about their tribal origins, nobility and deeds. One may also infer from this that the correct functioning of society was to some extent based on a knowledge of their place within it, and that this knowledge was gained from their 'history'. A similar point may be made regarding the poetry of the period, as Khālidī observed, ". . . in an environment without code of law or ethical system, jāhilī poetry supplied much of the wisdom and the practical moral standards handed down from one generation to the next"⁴⁶. It is known that even myth and legend exist out of a need in society to demonstrate appropriate behaviour⁴⁷ and thus it may be suggested that even the most spurious of the ayyām contains matter of important social record for the Arab way of life in this period, and as such has a historical value which cannot be ignored.

Main Sources Used in this Dissertation.

The earliest surviving account of the life of Muḥammad is that of Muḥammad b. Ishāq (d.761 CE / 151 AH), which has been passed on in the form of Ibn Hishām's recension of Ibn Ishāq's original sīra (Ibn Hishām d.813CE /218 AH)⁴⁸. The text has been largely unaltered, but Ibn Hishām has added his own notes to the

⁴⁵ Dūrī, p18.

⁴⁶ Khālidī, p4.

⁴⁷ *The Myths We Live By*, ed. Samuel and Thompson (1990).

⁴⁸ Ibn Hishām's recension was based on the account transmitted by al-Bakkā'ī, which he regarded to be the most reliable version (Dūrī, p36). There are also two recent editions of the sīra compiled by Muslim scholars from remnants of Ibn Ishāq's material to give what they suggest to be a more authentic work as they have attempted to reintroduce some of the material edited out by the more pious Ibn Hishām according to Khālidī (p34). They are by Suhayl Zakkar (Beirut 1978) and Muḥammad Hamidullah (Rabat 1976).

work⁴⁹. He also attempted to root out any obvious fabrications in the poetry and made the text more compatible with the view of ḥadīth scholars⁵⁰. In addition to Ibn Hishām's notes to the text, A. Guillaume added his own notes to his English translation⁵¹. Thus the original Ibn Ishāq sīra has been annotated and added to giving an invaluable document for any research on the early Arab period. Its value is increased by the large amount of background history given by Ibn Ishāq. However, the usefulness of Ibn Ishāq as a historical source has been questioned⁵². Part of the criticism of the work stems from his tendency to exaggerate and include a large amount of fabricated material. However, in spite of his reliance on qīṣaṣ for some material and the obvious forgeries in the poetry, the work must be seen as a record of the prevailing currents in politics and society of the day⁵³.

Almost contemporary with Ibn Hishām was Muḥammad b. 'Umar al- Wāqidi (d. 823CE /207 AH). His *Kitāb al- Maghāzī*⁵⁴, as implied by the title, dealt mostly

⁴⁹ Cairo Edition, 1966.

⁵⁰ Dūrī, p36. Khālidī went as far as to accuse Ibn Hishām of 'bowdlerising' the original sīra (Khālidī p35). Ibn Ishāq's text appears to have been rather controversial when it first appeared, no doubt partly because of the perceived sympathies of the author as a Qadarite and pro-Shiite, and also because some of the material shocked the religious establishment. Ibn Ishāq included anecdotes which made Muḥammad more 'human' (e.g. anecdotes about his lust for women and being saved only by Allah's intervention)which it is believed Ibn Hishām excised from his recension. See Khālidī p35-37.

⁵¹ The Guillaume translation (Oxford University Press, 11th edition, 1996) is a valuable tool for anyone wishing to use the sīra, partly because it is better indexed than the original. However, it cannot be used independently of the Arabic text as Guillaume's style of translation, while on the whole accurate and readable, contains some rather too free translations which may mislead.

⁵² Kennedy discussed the degree of reliability in *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphate* and Lammens went as far as to suggest that the chronology and content of the sīra was hopelessly confused and of almost no historical value for the life of Muḥammad ('L'Age de Mahomet et la chronologie de la sīra' in *Journal Asiatique* 1911, cited by Conrad, *BSOAS* 1987).

⁵³ Dūrī, p35. He suggests that the best way to use Ibn Ishāq is to be aware that he drew on three sources for his sīra, a solid historical tradition from ḥadīth scholars, popular tales and poetry and thirdly the Isrā'īliyyāt and legends about the ancient Arabs. By knowing from which tradition an account originates, its reliability may be assessed (Dūrī, p7-8).

⁵⁴ Ed. M. Jones, Three volumes, Oxford University Press, (1966).

with the Muslim conquests which took place during the life of Muḥammad⁵⁵. Al-Wāqidī was a very methodical scholar who was selective in his use of material and was rigorous in checking the reliability of the isnād⁵⁶. His work is much less reliant on qīṣās than Ibn Ishāq and, perhaps as a result of this less, poetry appears in his work than in the sīra. Al-Wāqidī's *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* is an essential companion to Ibn Ishāq as the former acquired none of his material from the latter⁵⁷. Al-Wāqidī does not dwell on historical events which were not related to the conquests of Muḥammad⁵⁸. He therefore gives no information about the early Arab period other than that which is given almost accidentally in his descriptions of the actions of the non-Muslim people, usually in wars with the Muslims.

One of the other histories of use in this dissertation is Muḥammad b. Sa'd's work, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubra*. Ibn Sa'd was a near contemporary of both Ibn Hishām and al-Wāqidī, being born in 784 CE /168 AH and dying in 844 CE /230 AH. He was in fact attached to al-Wāqidī as his secretary and studied under Hishām b. al-Kalbī⁵⁹, and thus was prominently placed in the development of some of the earliest written histories. The above mentioned work is his most famous. It was compiled as an aid to the study of traditions, listing 4250 persons relevant to the study of the life of Muḥammad. For the purposes of this study, he is an essential historian having devoted one section of his history to the women of the early Islamic community,

⁵⁵ Obviously from a linguistic perspective the term maghāzī refers specifically to raids and conquests. However, Dūrī pointed out that maghāzī literature later developed into a genre dealing with the whole of the prophetic life of Muḥammad (p24).

⁵⁶ Dūrī p37. Khālidī (p48) also noted that al-Wāqidī uses virtually no legendary material in his maghāzī, nor does he include any material before Muḥammad's call to prophethood unlike Ibn Hishām.

⁵⁷ Dūrī, p39.

⁵⁸ Al-Wāqidī wrote of Muḥammad as a political-military leader first and his role as a prophet-lawgiver was secondary to that (Khālidī p48).

⁵⁹ EI² s.v. Ibn Sa'd.

numbering about 600 entries⁶⁰. A biography is given of each one, which may contain little more than a small amount of genealogical data or may give several stories about the woman and the events of her life. There are several recensions of this work. The one used for the Leiden edition, which appears in the west to be the most often consulted, is that of ibn Hayyawah⁶¹. The recent English translation of volume eight, dealing specifically with the women of the early community was consulted⁶² for this thesis. It contains inaccuracies in translation, incomplete isnāds and is at best a guide for pinpointing relevant sections of the original Ibn Saʿd text.

Aḥmad b. Yaḥya al-Balādhurī (d.892 CE / 279AH) was probably born in Bagdad and travelled widely in the Middle East, and is also known to have studied under Ibn Saʿd and al- Madāʿinī. He wrote two major works, *Futūḥ al-Buldān* and *Anṣāb al-Ashrāf*⁶³, the former being particularly referred to in this study. In spite of its importance as a major historical work dealing with the Muslim conquests and the fact that it makes significant remarks about social conditions within the historical narrative⁶⁴, it is only of minor use here as it contains a few references to women during these conquests. The *Futūḥ al-Buldān* has been translated into English and is mostly reliable⁶⁵.

⁶⁰ EI² s.v. Ibn Saʿd.

⁶¹ EI² s.v. Ibn Saʿd.

⁶² This volume was translated by Aisha Bewley and published by Ta Ha Press in 1995. The quality of the translation is poor in several places, displaying inconsistencies of names in particular, going as far as to confuse *ibn* and *bint* one occasion when referring to Hind bint ʿUtba.

⁶³ The *Anṣāb al-Ashrāf* was never finished, though a complete manuscript of what was written is known and has been edited under the sponsorship of the Hebrew University (EI² s.v. al-Baladhūrī).

⁶⁴ Dūrī p62, EI² s.v. al-Baladhūrī.

⁶⁵ Published as *The Origins of the Islamic State*, two volumes, Columbia University Press, 1916.

Perhaps one of the greatest histories in terms of size and detail is the *Ta'rikh al-Rusul wa-l Mulūk* of Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 923 /310 AH). Though written later than the writers mentioned above, al-Ṭabarī's history is of great value in looking at the early Arab period as he includes a great deal of detailed information from creation to the maḥath. As with Ibn Hishām some of the work must be considered anecdotal and in some cases almost mythological in content. He was, however, careful in his study of isnāds, and whenever no isnād was available to source he took accounts only of rūwāt and historians he considered trustworthy⁶⁶. Al-Ṭabarī's history is also useful because of his habit of giving several different versions of the same event based on different isnāds. This is of course very useful, as what one transmitter may have included another would have omitted and thus it is possible to build up a fuller picture of what may have happened. Of course this also provides room for confusion when the accounts do not agree with one another.

The history of al-Ṭabarī is still being translated into English but is mostly complete. As each section has been translated by different scholars, several different styles of translation are apparent, from very literal to more literary, and the accuracy of translation also varies. A French translation from a Persian manuscript exists and this has been referred to when the text differs from the Arabic version⁶⁷.

Possibly one of the most useful sources when considering the early Arab period is in fact in chronological terms one of the latest of the histories used. It is the *Kitāb al-Aghānī* of Abū Farāj 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn al-Isfahānī (d.975 CE / 365 AH)⁶⁸. In

⁶⁶ Dūrī p70 .Al- Ṭabarī prefaced his own work with a statement of his belief in his work and his use of judgement in which were true accounts and which false (*Ta'rikh* 1:6-7). This paragraph in which he makes his rare statement, or disclaimer, regarding the authenticity of his work has been analysed by Khālidī (p74) and Humphreys (p73-75).

⁶⁷ Translated by Zotenberg, in four volumes, Paris 1871.

⁶⁸ The dates given here are taken from Kennedy, though Lyall gives an alternative year of death as 967 CE / 356AH, pxliv.

fact, as a source it is almost a literary work as much as it is a historical one as it deals with the poets and singers of the early Arab, Umayyad and ʿAbbāsīd periods, based largely on the traditions of Abū Ubaydah and al-Asmaʿī⁶⁹. While this book is essentially a compilation of literary work, it contains anecdotes from history as transmitted to the writer as well as extracts of poems and songs. Although this is a later source, being compiled up to three centuries after some of the events described, it is nonetheless an important one. It contains material not found in an earlier source, and in this respect is rather unusual. However, it was written at a time when a conscious effort was being made to record the oral culture of the Arabs and as such it may represent the first attempt to record some of the poems and stories until.

The two works of Muḥammad ibn Ḥabīb al-Baghdādī have also been consulted, *Kitāb al-Muḥabbar*⁷⁰ and *Kitāb al-Munammaq*⁷¹. Both deal often with early history of the Arabs and their religious practices, for example *Kitāb al-Muḥabbar* contains an entire section devoted to the different talbīyyāt of the pagan idols. While much of the content of these two books can be found elsewhere, there is some unique material and additions to the standard versions of events.

One of the latest historians consulted is Ibn al-Athīr. ʿIzz al-Dīn Abū al-Ḥasan was one of three brothers all of whom were historians. He was born in 1160 CE and spent much of his life in Mosul, though he travelled often to Baghdad. Aged 28 he was in the army of Ṣalaḥ al-Dīn fighting the Crusaders, and it is for his account of the Crusades that he is best known. The first volume of his historical work *al-Kamāl*

⁶⁹ Lyall, *Ancient Arabian Poetry*, p. xlv.

⁷⁰ Ed. I. Lichtenstädter, Hyderabad (1945).

⁷¹ Ed. Kh. Fariq, Hyderabad (1964).

fi al-Ta'rikh contains a chapter on the 'Jāhiliyya' which the author specifically states contains material not included by Abū Ja'far, that is, not to be found in al-Ṭabarī⁷². While this may call into question its reliability as al-Ṭabarī was such a collector of variant accounts, and indeed it is notably lacking often in *isnāds*⁷³, it may still be referred to for comparison and corroboration. Ibn al-Athīr spent the last days of his life living in Aleppo where he died in 1233 CE.

While superficially a geographical treatise, al-Yāqūt's *Mu'jam al-Buldān*⁷⁴ is often an informative source on historical anecdotes. If the location of an event is known then it is quite possible that it may be noted in *Mu'jam al-Buldān*.

Muḥammad ibn al-Kalbī (d. 819/204) wrote what is one of the most important sources for this period, the *Kitāb al-Āṣnām*, or *Book of Idols*⁷⁵. This is a very short work, and is essentially a list of the idols of pagan Arabia with some anecdotes about each one. Usually the information includes which tribes venerated the given idol, where one might find its shrine and who guarded it. For some other more important deities additional information is provided and this often corresponds with that found in other sources.

For material specifically dealing with Mecca itself before and after the conquest of the city, al-Azraqī's *Akḥbār Makka* is often useful⁷⁶.

Of less importance to this study but of great value generally is the *Mu'rūj al-Dhahāb*, written by 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn al-Mas'ūdī (d.956 CE/ 345 AH)⁷⁷.

⁷² Vol. 1, p345 Beirut (1899).

⁷³ The general lack of sources in his work is one of the criticisms levelled at Ibn al-Athīr and is taken by the writer of the article on him in EI² to be a sign of his modernist approach to history.

⁷⁴ Ed. H.F. Wüstenfeld, (Leipzig 1866-73) in six volumes.

⁷⁵ Cairo, ed. Aḥmad Zaki Pasha 1924. English Translation by N. Faris Princeton University Press 1952. In addition to this he was a great genealogist, taking the works of his father, also a distinguished historian and improving on them (Khālidi p50 and EI² s.v Ibn al-Kalbī).

⁷⁶ Edited by H.F. Wüstenfeld, Leipzig (1857-61) in four volumes.

While it may at first appear that there are many original Arabic sources available on the period in question, they are often reliant on each other in chronological order and therefore it is unusual to find anything new in later accounts. It is the reliance of more recent historians on older texts that gives great value to isnāds, firstly to see which sources are used by whom, and secondly to gauge the authenticity of the account by the reliability of the transmission .

Literature.

Literature in its broadest sense is a vital part of studying the history of this period of Arab society. The literary output of early Arabia as it is known today is essentially poetic, indeed the early Arabs were renowned for their compositions. It is not known how long the Arabs had been composing poetry as there are no examples dating from earlier than around 500 CE⁷⁸. It might be suggested that poetry did exist before this time because the development of the very rigid conventions governing the composition of the qaṣīda or ode were already formed by this time and little is evident in these oldest poems of an immature style suggesting that this was innovative⁷⁹.

Poetry seems to have been the main achievement of early Arabian culture, as Ibn Khaldūn commented, "the Arabs did not know anything except poetry, because at that time, they practised no science and knew no craft"⁸⁰. As yet no other forms of high culture have been evident among the remains of the Arabs, although some of the artefacts found in the peninsula suggest that there may have been some

⁷⁷ Beirut 1978.

⁷⁸ Lyall, pxv.

⁷⁹ Lyall, pxvi.

⁸⁰ Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddimah*, English trans. By F.Rosenthal 1958 vol. 1 p401.

beginnings of an appreciation of arts and crafts⁸¹. It would appear that there was as yet insufficient wealth and prosperity to have permitted the kind of patronage required for cultural advancement in the Hejaz. The development of higher forms of cultural expression in arts and monuments and so on can only occur when there is a concentration of wealth⁸² and also free labour to devote to non-essential activities⁸³. It is interesting that a very similar point was made by Ibn Khaldūn several centuries earlier in his Muqaddimah with reference to the origins of singing in society

...it should be known that singing originates in a civilisation when it becomes abundant and (people) progress from the necessities to the conveniences and then to the luxuries and have a great diversity of luxuries⁸⁴

Hodgson wrote regarding the patronage and development of culture that the "temple was the focus of whatever high culture there was"⁸⁵ in developing cities, thus the reconstruction and edification of the Ka'ba is some evidence that progress was being made in this direction.

The nature of life for many inhabitants of the peninsula meant that high culture had to be portable⁸⁶, and as such poetry was an obvious expression of cultural development. Therefore, as perhaps the only real creative outlet for the peninsular Arabs, poetry was highly developed and required great talent and skill.

It may be questioned how useful poetry might be to the historical inquiry. In the context of the early Arabs it must be thought of as beneficial as while it may not

⁸¹ The pottery and statuettes found at Qaryat al-Fau suggest that there were artisans living and working in the heart of the Arabian desert at this time, although the styles of work suggest that although it was manufactured there the makers were from elsewhere and also it is not known whether these items were for local use or trade (*Qaryat al-Fau : A Portrait of Pre-Islamic Civilisation in Arabia*, A. Al-Ansary 1984).

⁸² Hodgson, vol. 1 p106. He made this comment as a general statement without referring to any one place.

⁸³ Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests* (1981)p15.

⁸⁴ Ibn Khaldūn, p.401.

⁸⁵ Hodgson, vol. 1 p106.

⁸⁶ Donner, p17.

be a chronicle in the style familiar from western scholarship, it is by no means bereft of historical traces. Lyall wrote that the Arabian ode "sets forth before us a series of pictures, drawn with confident skill and first-hand knowledge, of the life the maker lived, of the objects among which he moved, of his horse, his camel, the wild creatures of the wilderness, and of the landscape in the midst of which his life and theirs was set"⁸⁷, and it is this almost narrative feature that puts forward images of the life and times of these people and the way they lived which can furnish the reader with data. In addition to this, the poems themselves may have been preceded by prose introductions in which the poet would explain the composition and clarify the historical context⁸⁸. While the poetry may not give dates, times and analysis of events, it must be seen as a sort of social history which is historical accidentally rather than intentionally.

Poetry has always had a traditional role as a historical register for the Arabs, as was noted above in the discussion of Arab historiography. The famous quote from ibn Rashīq

when there appeared a poet in a family of the Arabs, the other tribes would gather together to that family and wish them joy at their good luck. Feasts would be got ready, the women of the tribe would play upon lutes, as they were wont to do at bridals, and the men and the boys would congratulate one another, for a poet was a defence to their good name and a means of perpetuating their glorious deeds and of establishing their fame for ever. And they used not to wish one another joy but for three things - the birth of a boy, the coming to light of a poet and the foaling of a noble mare⁸⁹.

tells of the importance attached to the coming to light of a poet and how it would be celebrated by the tribe because the poet was the one who protected their good

⁸⁷ Lyall, pxviii.

⁸⁸ Dūrī, p55.

⁸⁹ Translation by C.Lyall in Nicholson p71, quoting ibn Rashīq in Suyūṭī's *Muzhīr*.

name and was the means for perpetuating their glorious deeds and fame for ever⁹⁰.

Ibn Khaldūn also tells us that the Arabs

...made poetry the archive of their history, their wisdom and their nobility
and the touchstone of their natural gift for expressing themselves correctly⁹¹.

This sentiment echoes that of al-Yaʿqūbī, who wrote:

For the Arabs poetry took the place of philosophy and most of the sciences
If a tribe produced a skilful poet with striking images and the right choice of
words, they would bring him to the annual markets and seasons of
pilgrimage⁹²

The idea expressed by ibn Khaldūn above of the Arab's natural gift for expressing themselves correctly might be questioned in literature as the fundamental problem with the use of literary material, by which in the case of the Arabs one usually refers to the poetry or the epic tales of a semi-mythological nature which are still told to this day, is that they may be a mirror of self-perception, and certainly in the case of Arab poetry constituted the tribal memory and thereby historical consciousness, they would still be victims of their own purposes.

Setting aside the need to bear in mind some literary licence in reading literature for historical purposes, it must be stated that traditionally much value was placed on poetry in the history of Arabia. As the famous quote of ibn Qutayba stated, the poetry was the root of tribal self-awareness and scholarship has in the past sought to find patterns of life in the poems. McDonald also points out that poetry in pre-literate societies serves a social purpose and indeed that society would almost cease to function without it. Arabia appears to be viewed as consistent with this

⁹⁰ Ibn Rashīq quoted in Suyūṭī's *Muzhīr*, translated by C. Lyall, *Ancient Arabian Poetry* p17. Also quoted in Nicholson, p71.

⁹¹ Ibn Khaldūn, p402.

⁹² Al-Yāqūbī, *Taʾrīkh* 1:262. Translation by Khālidī p2.

analysis⁹³. This dissertation does not attempt to do anything other than trawl for historical inference, although there is a developing study of the poetry in western scholarship based on literary criticism with a strong anthropological influence which is attempting to find deeper interpretations of the works⁹⁴.

The usefulness of poetry for history might seem to be limited to the battle days of the Arabs or inter-tribal relations, with a side issue of attitudes towards themselves and their environment, such as what constituted beauty, or which animals were thought to have certain characteristics. In matters of religion it does seem that poetry will yield slim pickings as theological or spiritual matters do not seem immediately obvious in the words. This has led some writers to assume that there was little religious life among the people and they were spiritually impoverished⁹⁵. The question of religious life will be returned to in chapter three and the value of the poetry noted in context there, although it must be agreed that in terms of 'facts' the poetry does not offer large amounts to the history of religion.

The issue of authenticity raises its head again in relation to the poetry of the early Arabs as well⁹⁶. It has been suggested by western and Arab critics that the poetry attributed to the poets of the sixth and seventh centuries was composed at a significantly later date⁹⁷. They have attempt to prove this with linguistic evidence,

⁹³ M.V.McDonald, "Orally Transmitted Poetry in Pre-Islamic Arabia and other pre-literate societies" *JAL* 9 (1978).

⁹⁴ Stetkevych's *The Mute Immortals Speak* is such a work. The book is part of a series of studies of myth and poetics, and in it she explores the interaction between myth and ritual and traditional Arab poetry attempting to find ritual patterns in the structure of the poetry mirrored in society.

⁹⁵ F. Gabrieli "Religious Poetry in Early Islam" in *Arabic Poetry: Theory and Development* (1971)ed. Von Grunebaum, R. Blachère, *Histoire de la Litterature Arabe* vol. 1 p12 and 180 (1952).

⁹⁶ An example of the discussion of the authenticity of the poetry is found in Nöldeke *Beitrage zur Kenntniss der Poesie der alten Araber* (1864).

⁹⁷ The main arguments against the authenticity of the poetry have been from Taha Hussein and D.S.Margoliouth, "The Origins of Arabic Poetry" *JRAS* 1925. Their argument was considered and found to be incorrect by Arberry in *The Seven Odes*. The Margoliouth argument was also criticised effectively by A.K. Kinany in his PhD thesis on the Development

such as the apparent Islamic references which seem to pepper the corpus of remaining poems and conversely the lack of any religious references, also it is believed that as it was not written down it cannot be authenticated and any written sources contemporary with the time much of the classical poetry was said to have been composed shows little poetic value⁹⁸.

This approach denies several things. First of all, it is in denial of the oral tradition of Arab life at this time. As discussed above when dealing with the historical accuracy one can expect from a ninth century text on a sixth century subject, a similar conclusion can be drawn for the poetry.

Secondly, what cannot be stated with any degree of certainty though is that the poetry has remained completely unchanged during the time between initial composition and written record. It is likely that it may have been added to or subtracted from during this time and the circumstances of this and the time it happened is not something of which the critic is likely to be aware even if a literary inconsistency is found.

Theological Works

In considering the questions proposed in this work, Arabic theological scholarship can offer some insights into events and attitudes of the time. It might be said of the collections of *ḥadīth* and the books of *tafsīr* that they are semi-historical works in their own right, as they give useful information about events in the life of Muḥammad and sometimes more general, though perhaps unintentional, data about

of Ghazal Poetry in Arabic Literature" (p11-20). The entire critiques will not be repeated here.

⁹⁸ This is in reference to the inscriptions which had been discovered in northern Arabia at this time.

earlier practices. In this dissertation, four main works are referred to, Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī, Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, the Sunān of Abū Dā'ūd and the Tafsīr of Ṭabarī.

The Ṣaḥīḥ of Bukhārī was compiled by Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī (810CE / 194 AH - 870 CE / 256 AH), a compiler of traditions who claimed to have consulted over 1000 sheikhs in the search for ḥadīth during his travels round the main centres of Islamic scholarship⁹⁹. His inspiration to write the Ṣaḥīḥ was said to have come from Ishāq b. Raḥāwagh who once said he wished that someone would compile a book of only genuine traditions¹⁰⁰. By the fourth century it was recognised generally as one of the most reliable collections of ḥadīth for Sunni scholars along with the Ṣaḥīḥ of Muslim. Al-Bukhārī was recognised within his own lifetime for his knowledge of the ḥadīth and the skill he possessed in telling the real from the fake. Having said this, his work does not appear to be free of error, al-Darawutni, a 10th century traditionist, claimed to have found 200 of his ḥadīth to be fake¹⁰¹. His Ṣaḥīḥ took sixteen years to compile, selected from 600000 traditions¹⁰².

The Ṣaḥīḥ of Muslim¹⁰³ is likewise an important collection of ḥadīth compiled by its eponymous traditionist, Abū l-Ḥusayn Muslim b. al-Hajjāj b. Muslim. He was born in Nishapur in 817 CE / 206AH and was said to have also travelled widely learning traditions before his death in 875CE/ 261AH. His Ṣaḥīḥ (more properly known as al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ) is along with al-Bukhārī's Ṣaḥīḥ considered one of the most reputable sources of ḥadīth.

⁹⁹ EI 2 sv al-Bukhārī.

¹⁰⁰ Siddiqi, *Hadith Literature Its Origin, Development and Special Features* (1993) p56.

¹⁰¹ Siddiqi p58.

¹⁰² EI 2 sv al-Bukhārī.

¹⁰³ Lahore 1976.

The *Sunān* of Abū Dā'ūd differs from the Ṣaḥīḥ collections in that it was concerned primarily with those ḥadīth which were relevant to daily life rather than obscure points of law and ethics. Abū Dā'ūd (817/203 - 888/275) studied and died in Basra but spent much of his life in Baghdad and is regarded as a reliable collector of traditions and he pointed out those defects in any he included¹⁰⁴. This sunān is generally accepted as the most important work of its genre.

Al-Ṭabarī's tafsīr, *Jāmi' al-Bayān wa Ṭāwīl al-Qur'ān*,¹⁰⁵ is one of the most comprehensive compilations of Qur'anic exegesis from the medieval period. Al-Ṭabarī¹⁰⁶ is especially useful for the historian dealing with early Islam as his collection of work often includes references to non-Muslim Arab practices.

It was realised by the Muslim community that many of their ḥadīth were false at an early stage, and a science of ḥadīth criticism developed to sift the spurious compositions out from the genuine sayings of Muḥammad¹⁰⁷. The quṣṣās invented extraordinary traditions attached to very good isnāds in order to astonish the public by whom the storytellers hoped to be paid. These traditions are more easily recognised as false, though other more clever forgers often went undetected and these seemed to be spreading false doctrines which sometimes were so polished that they made it into collections of ḥadīth before anyone spotted the mistakes¹⁰⁸. To help authenticate ḥadīth, the biographies of all those people who appear in isnads were collected as the chain of transmission and its reliability became increasingly

¹⁰⁴ Siddiqi p61.

¹⁰⁵ Cairo 1954.

¹⁰⁶ For details on al-Ṭabarī as a historian, refer to the earlier notes on his historical work, *Ta'rikh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk*.

¹⁰⁷ Lewis, *The Arabs in History* p36, Siddiqi p31. Siddiqi noted that forgeries of ḥadīth may have begun to appear as early as the caliphate of Abū Bakr, and it has even been suggested that they first appeared while Muḥammad was still alive (p32).

¹⁰⁸ EI² sv ḥadīth.

important. As a result certain names are instant warning signals to the reader that this ḥadīth may be suspect.

Non-Arab Sources

In this work some non-Arab sources have been used. Dealing with this particular period, while it would be possible to compile the remaining Arab historical traditions on a subject, it may be that the addition of some extra-Arabic sources augment and illuminate the Arabic material.

The major non-Muslim religious source consulted here is the Bible¹⁰⁹. In the 19th century in particular, Biblical exegetes would on occasion consider the known practices of the polytheistic Arabs in order to make more of the Biblical material with which they were primarily concerned. This dissertation does the opposite, attempting to glean potential commonalities between the people and events of the Biblical narrative and that which can be determined from the remaining Arabic sources.

As noted above, the degree of continuity of practice is an important aspect of this dissertation and in order to demonstrate the similarities between two derivations of Western Semitic practice both need to be considered.

Some classical historical sources have also been consulted, especially Herodotus, with note made of any possibility for inaccuracy in his reports. References to other non-Arabic historians are used in translation found in secondary sources.

¹⁰⁹ The editions of the Bible consulted here are the *New International* version (International Bible Society, Colorado 1984), chosen because it took its translation from Greek, Aramaic and original Hebrew texts and the *Soncino Chumash* (London 1981).

Secondary Sources and European Scholarship

This period in Arabian history, while appearing in many historical works on early Islam and the Islamic world, is not one which has benefited from a huge amount of specialised study. With few exceptions, such as the studies by Menachem Kister, Michael Lecker and Alan Jones much of the work available in the areas of religion and literature is of some age.

Secondary material on the religion of the early Arabs was initially produced by Biblical scholars, indeed a reasonable proportion were involved in the church such as Henri Lammens who was a Jesuit priest¹¹⁰. The preponderance of Biblical scholars has inevitably had some effect on the way in which the religion of the period was viewed, and this will be returned to in greater depth in chapter three when the religious life of Arabia before Muḥammad will be covered. Other notable commentators on the subject include Wellhausen and Robertson-Smith. Although all of these men wrote a century ago, their works are still some of the most frequently referred to in this field, as, in spite of their age, they are still the most recent or best available.

Wellhausen's *Reste Arabische Heidentums*¹¹¹ was probably the most seminal text on the religion of pagan Arabia specifically and still is, even if it may be amended in the light of recent developments in related subjects.

William Robertson-Smith (1846 - 1894) was primarily a Christian divinity scholar, who researched Semitic practice from the traditional viewpoint of

¹¹⁰ It is thought to be well-known that Lammens was very hostile towards Islam in his writing, consequently his work less acceptable and some of his more valuable insights have been disregarded as a result (This view is noted in footnote 4 to "Abraha and Muḥammad: Some Observations Apropos of Chronology and Literary Topoi", Conrad *BSOAS* 1987).

¹¹¹ The third edition referred to here was published in Berlin in 1927. Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918) wrote extensively on theological matters regarding the ancient Semites from a nineteenth century Christian perspective.

illuminating the origins of Christianity. He did manage to do this without too much obvious Christian bias, and while a reassessment of his writings has been produced¹¹², he was certainly pioneering in his time compiling a still very useful volume covering every aspect of Semitic religious practice, his *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*¹¹³. His other work of particular interest to the student of early Arabia is *Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia*¹¹⁴, which, along with Gertrude Stern's *Marriage in Early Islam*¹¹⁵ on the position of women in the early Muslim community, are the only two works dealing specifically with social relations in this period. As an indicator of its continued value to the student, it may be noted that after a hundred year gap *Religion of the Semites* has been republished within the last few years.

On the subject of literature, for commentaries on the poetry of the early Arabs, one is also more or less dependant on works written almost a century ago. The work of Arberry on the translation of the Seven Odes is useful¹¹⁶, if in some places rather free in its translation. The translations and commentaries of Sir Charles Lyall¹¹⁷ are still today considered some of the best, Jones noted in the introduction to his *Arabic Poetry* volume one that for a good introduction to the field Lyall's *Ancient Arabian Poetry* was the best there was. Also, Nicholson's *A Literary History of the Arabs* is a most useful reference work¹¹⁸. Other English translations of

¹¹² William Robertson-Smith: *Essays in Reassessment*, ed. W. Johnstone, Sheffield 1995.

¹¹³ *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, Edinburgh 1889, Third Edition (with additional notes by Cooke). This work has recently been republished presumably to coincide with the above noted volume of essays, by Sheffield University Press. This alone, it may be presumed, testifies to the enduring value of this work.

¹¹⁴ Cambridge University Press 1885.

¹¹⁵ This book was published in 1939 and drew on material in her PhD thesis *Women in the Early Islamic Community from Ibn Sa'd's Tabaqat al-Kabir and Ibn Hanbal's Musnad*, School of Oriental and African Studies 1925.

¹¹⁶ *The Seven Odes*, London (1957).

¹¹⁷ *Ancient Arabian Poetry* (1885).

¹¹⁸ 1930.

the poetry exist, along with commentaries on grammar and context, such as Captain F.E.Johnson¹¹⁹. Earlier attempts at translations have been largely superseded in quality and accuracy, by those mentioned above. More recent valuable works on this poetry are Alan Jones two volumes on *Early Arabic Poetry*¹²⁰.

In addition to the English translations and commentaries on the poems, there are some Arabic works which have been consulted. The one which has been referred to in the text is that of al-Tibrīzī¹²¹. His intertextual notes have provided some additional information to that available from the English commentaries.

Archaeological Sources

Until we can dig for history in Arabia, as we have dug in Egypt, Palestine and Mesopotamia, the early centuries of Arabia will remain obscure and the searcher in the field will have to pick his way warily among the half-erected and half-demolished hypotheses which the historian, with the scanty equipment of fact he now possesses can neither complete nor raze to the ground¹²²

Thus wrote Bernard Lewis three decades ago in the introduction to *The Arabs in History*. While Lewis made this statement more with the very early stages of distinguishable Arab life in mind, even thinking of the origins of the Semitic peoples, this statement is just as applicable to later time periods. The Arabian peninsula has for some time been ignored by the archaeologist, who regarded it as somewhat infertile territory. In recent years this has changed, and some research has been undertaken. Unfortunately for this dissertation, the research has been concentrated more on Oman and the Gulf Region than on the centre of the peninsula and the Hejaz. There has been a small amount of work done of use however, such as the

¹¹⁹ Bombay (1893).

¹²⁰ Jones, *Early Arabic Poetry*, vols. 1 and 2. Michael Sells book, *Desert Tracings*, is also useful.

¹²¹ *A Commentary on Ten Ancient Arabic Poems*, New Jersey 1965, based on Lyall's 1894 manuscript edition.

¹²² Lewis, *The Arabs in History* (1977)p22.

University of Riyadh digs at Qaryat al-Fau¹²³. There are also now some excavations under way in the vicinity of Medina which may prove beneficial¹²⁴.

The traditional Bedouin way of life means that there may not be huge amounts of physical evidence to uncover as personal possessions were not amassed by the tribes in the way one might find in a more affluent settlement, but if the finds made public so far are an indicator of what may wait to be uncovered, then it would appear that archaeology has much to offer the study of this period.

While the Arabian peninsula itself has been relatively unexplored, the northern Arabian provinces in Syria and the Levant have been the subject of intense research for many years and thus there is a wealth of material available for consultation. While much of the northern evidence considered in this work is used to illustrate slightly earlier historical periods, the time difference is not that large in some instances and is still significant to the discussion. Even in the largest gaps, the evidence may still add to the continuity theory proposed here.

Women in the Sources.

Women do not receive the same amount of attention in the Arabic sources as men. The relaters of the ayyām narrative were not concerned with the deeds of women in war specifically. Thus there is no special collection of stories about women from this period unlike in Islamic writings where in some collections women are systematically placed in their own sections¹²⁵. Thus women appear scattered through the narratives of the ayyām literature, which is in fact little different to the way in

¹²³ Documented in *Qaryat al-Fau, A Portrait of Pre-Islamic Civilisation in Saudi Arabia*, by Professor al-Ansary, Riyadh 1982.

¹²⁴ I must thank Dr Y. Dutton for this information, although unfortunately none of the results of these excavations were referred to in this study.

¹²⁵ Lichtenstädter, *Women in the Ayyam al- Arab*, (1935) p5.

which they appear in the majority of Islamic histories. Unless women were involved in the life of the Prophet they did not appear in the books of ṣaḥāba, and thus are in a position entirely like that of their non-Muslim ancestresses.

Women are very much present in the literature of the early Arabs. While there is little doubt that the men in the stories concerning the ayyām took centre stage performing their heroic deeds, the part women played in the battle day, be it as the cause of the war, a captive, a poetess, a *kāhina* and so on, are all mentioned. Non-Muslim women appear in the Islamic histories in the sections which deal with pre-Islamic events and this too is a useful source.

Women are of course an important feature of the poetry of the Arabs. The *nasib* of the classical qaṣīda often includes the lament of the poet for his lost love. Other poets give further attention to the women they have encountered in the rest of the poem.

The way in which women are portrayed in the sources appears to be quite the same as the portrayal of men. Individuals were judged on their actions first rather than on their sex. However, as ". . . it is the abnormal rather than the normal run of family relationships that attract the interest of the narrators"¹²⁶ it is probably the case that the accounts of women who are named and discussed are not perhaps examples of the typical experiences of women. It can be proposed that the best examples of women's activities from the ayyām is when they are not named specifically as this may show that what they were doing was worthy of note as part of the general story of the day, but that it was not remarkable enough for the rawiy to devote time to it. The same might be said for the poetry.

¹²⁶ Lyons, *The Arabian Epic* p41.

The way in which women were portrayed in later poetry and stories is of course radically different. An interesting feature of the Arabian epics is the blending of pre-Islamic and Islamic themes in the narrative¹²⁷. However these epics, while they could provide some insight into this period as they do have their roots there, they have been heavily influenced by Islam to the extent that they provide little historical assistance for a study of this kind.

There are two main secondary works on women in the pre-Islamic world. *La Femme Arabe* by Perron considers the Arab woman both before and after Islam¹²⁸. This is a useful work, but unfortunately Perron, as many of his contemporaries, failed often to give source references for his material which reduces the value of the book as a scholarly resource.

Women in the Aiyam al-ʿArab by Ilse Lichtenstädter is a study of female life during warfare in pre-Islamic Arabia, and as such her work must be credited for some of the background to this thesis. Her work, though brief, is of great value, but as she consults only three sources it is by no means comprehensive. Her study is mostly concerned with the capture of women in battle and their treatment by the captors. In addition to this, her conclusions deal exclusively with the social status of women but do not give a complete representation of the situation as she assumes the lives of women were confined to the domestic sphere. Thus, while this dissertation covers the same subject matter, the approach taken and foci are different, thus the conclusions are also not always in agreement with those proposed by Lichtenstädter.

¹²⁷ For example, Kruk, "Warrior Women in Arabic Popular Romance: Qannasa bint Muzahim and other valiant ladies" *JAL* 25 (1994), Fewda Malti-Douglas *Women's Body, Women's Word* (1991) and MC Lyons *The Arabian Epic* (1995).

¹²⁸ Paris, (1858).

Lichtenstädter notes the earlier work on women in the ayyām by G. Meyer, 'Die arabische Frau in der Schlacht'¹²⁹. This article is quite brief, and is certainly only a precursor to Lichtenstadter's later study as it deals with few examples in little detail. It also does not consider the possible religious implications of women in battle.

Some notes on Dates.

The matter of accurate dating of events during the period under discussion is often somewhat problematic. The way in which events were remembered among the early Arabs was considerably different to the way in which later historians would wish to meticulously record dates and times. Finley's comment on the Greek oral tradition is equally true here. He stated that the early Greek world was "not in thrall to the highly sophisticated, highly abstract scientific conception of time as a measurable continuum, a conception which is largely meaningless for ordinary human purposes"¹³⁰. Thus as long as there was an awareness of time such that it mattered to daily life, its accurate measurement and record was irrelevant.

By comparison to other near eastern societies of this period, the early Arabs had a much vaguer conception of time and the recording of events was based much more on what happened than when. Any notion of chronology and relative timing was reckoned by its relation to a great event in history¹³¹. Therefore there was no continuous, regulated dating system amongst these people. It is for this reason that to attempt to give absolute dates is often a naive ambition on the part of the historian. Dates which can be given with some degree of certainty are usually calculable by their reference in other sources, and thereby it may be possible to

¹²⁹ *Mitteilungen der Anthropologischen Gesellschaft* 39 (1909).

¹³⁰ M.I. Finley, 'Myth, Memory and History' *History and Theory* 4 (1965) p293.

¹³¹ *Dūrī*, p14-20.

arrive at some kind of date. It must be noted that even the birthdate of Muhammad himself is questionable and if such an important date is uncertain from an objective point of view, then how much more uncertain must other dates be¹³².

Dates in this work are therefore often rather approximate, and indeed sometimes only a century, or part of a century may be offered as a date. Where some fixed date has been agreed on in secondary sources it is given, though if there are alternatives they will be noted.

¹³² The confusion over the date of 'Ām al-fīl and the birth of Muḥammad is discussed in "Some Observations Apropos of Chronology and Literary Topoi", Conrad, *BSOAS* (1987).

Chapter Two.

Early Arabia: Aspects of the Lives of Women

The purpose of this chapter is to examine certain aspects of the lives of women in order to construct a picture of early Arab womanhood and their place in society.

Arabian society was tribal and the individual existed in relation to the others in his or her group. In broader society the position of the person was determined by their affiliation to several inter-related groups determined by kinship¹³³. The establishment of the social milieu in which these women lived is extremely important as a determinant of their place in the specific areas of war and religion.

The position of women in Arabia before Islam became the dominant social system has usually been discussed with reference to how it was to change thereafter. This position has been perceived by some scholars to be worse before Islam. For example, Esposito attributes the lack of women's' rights in Arabia to social necessity. Infanticide appears to form the main thrust of his argument. Keeping down the number of women in the tribe by infanticide was an act needed for the survival of the tribe, and those who lived to adulthood could expect to have their lives restricted because of the importance attached to their virginity and reputation¹³⁴. Thus Islam was a force for general improvement.

However, there are several scholars who assume a comparatively high social position for women in this period. For example, Lyall, in his introductory remarks to *Ancient Arabian Poetry* states that women had equal status within the community

¹³³ Donner, p20.

¹³⁴ Esposito, "Women's Rights in Islam", *Islamic Studies* vol. 14(1975)p100/1.

than much more than under Islam. He writes that "they had much liberty which was afterwards denied them" and then goes on to elaborate those areas in which he felt they had lost status, such as in marriage rights, divorce and public life ¹³⁵. This opinion is shared by Nicholson, who notes the same features of comparative emancipation as Lyall. He also states that the nobility and social status of women was something they held in their own right and was not merely a reflection of the status of the men¹³⁶.

The usual middle path through the debate about the fortunes of women in this period of transition is that some conditions were better as a result of Islam, though not all. In those areas in which there has been a marked deterioration in women's' status, the problem is usually traced to an event after Muḥammad's death and was not part of the initial spirit of Islam¹³⁷.

In this chapter, the areas under consideration are: infanticide, marriage and divorce and two indicators of social visibility, trade and culture. The importance of honour in Arabian society will also be noted.

An analysis of women in Arabia calls for the use of some anthropological theory. The difficulty with the usual approach to the use of social and anthropological theory in women's history has been the emphasis on the theses of Engels and Marx. These theories are of course valuable, but in the context of Arabian history their value is perhaps less than for European studies. Engel's classic work, *Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State* attributes the 'historic defeat of the female sex' to the development of private property, and there is an assumption of

¹³⁵ Lyall, pxxxii.

¹³⁶ Nicholson, p 87-8.

¹³⁷ This approach seems to be the one favoured by Stowasser, "The Status of Women in Early Islam" in *Muslim Women* ed. Freda Hussein and Abbott, "Women and the State in Early Islam" *AJSL* 58 (1941).

a gender division of labour along 'primitive' lines of man the hunter and woman the homemaker. When men gained property they began to control female sexuality as a necessary part of ensuring that their property stayed within the kin group. Engel's assumption was that tribes settled, learnt agriculture and husbandry which led to an automatic progression to men holding all the power in commercial life and women being relegated to the domestic sphere. He provides no mechanism to say how this was achieved or why¹³⁸.

This theory is useful, and superficially it would seem to be the exact answer to the question of the changing status of women in Arabia. The trend towards urbanisation created the problem of fixed property. As Mecca became more commercially successful, women's rights began to disappear as men needed to be assured of the paternity of their heirs. This interpretation fits in neatly with the traditional Watt theory of social dysfunctionality in the mercantile community and Minai follows this lead¹³⁹.

However, as Engel's theory was based on European agricultural society, and its reflection in Victorian attitudes, it may be questioned as to how useful it really is in a deeper analysis of the changing face of Arab culture at this time. There was a movement towards urbanisation, but it was rather fluid, ties were maintained with the nomads and some tribes could be both nomadic and sedentary. Wealth was based on trade and herding as opposed to agriculture, supplemented by raiding other tribes. Thus Arabian society was constructed very differently to European, and Engels theory is perhaps not entirely appropriate.

¹³⁸ Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (1986) p21.

¹³⁹ Minai, *Women and Islam* (1981) p6. She attributes the loss of women's right and status to the breakdown of traditional Bedouin value systems and socio-economic disparities unknown to the nomad.

In Arabia, as will be demonstrated, women were involved in commercial life, even when married and mothers. The need to control female sexuality in Arabia before the institutions of Islamic law was expressed through the force of tribal custom and practice which could not be transgressed. However, as the customs of legitimate relationships were equally applicable to men as to women, it may be suggested that human sexuality as a whole was controlled in Arabia in a way appropriate to that society.

Infanticide.

The practice of infanticide is not peculiar to any one people in the ancient world, and has been practised by other societies throughout history. The reasons for the practice are largely uncertain and may only be speculated upon. It has been suggested that it was a method of spacing children, and also that it may have resulted from periods of famine and overpopulation¹⁴⁰. However, the belief that it is always as a result of economic forces can be called into question by its continued

¹⁴⁰ Ward, *A World Full of Women* p72. Also O'Leary suggests that among the Bedouin who "can hardly do more than keep body and soul together" it would have been practised to keep down the population (*Arabia Before Muḥammad*, p202). It could also be suggested that a slightly less crude form of population control among the Bedouin of Arabia at the time of Muḥammad was the practice of urban women sending their children out to wet nurses in the desert (Ibn Hishām vol.1 p162, p70 in translation). While 'officially' this was to make the children more healthy and to attune them to the ancestral way of life, it also displayed an interesting inter-action between the urban and nomadic groups to their mutual benefit. For the women of the towns, where presumably prosperity meant that family size was not an issue and times of famine rarer, to have more children was an option and one which they may have exercised for the benefit of the tribe to increase the numbers. For the women of the desert, life may have been considerably harsher and therefore population control may have been a greater concern. Infanticide is, if it was a method of population control, a very crude one. However, if the woman was nursing an infant, she was less likely to conceive shortly after the weaning of her own child, and thus the tribe size was limited. Therefore it may be suggested that the practice was of mutual benefit to both parties. The urban women were free to have more children more quickly, the Bedouin woman would have a natural contraceptive and also bring in some small income to the tribal unit.

practice by the Roman elite, who were not suffering famine or hardship¹⁴¹. The Canaanites are known to have buried children in the foundations of their buildings. The Persians are also said to have buried people alive, for example Xerxes wife, Amestris, is alleged to have had fourteen boys of noble birth buried as a present to the deity of the underworld in the hope that they would satisfy the god and she would not die¹⁴².

It is known that infanticide existed at the time of Muḥammad, though how widespread it was is not clear. It is known that it was a practice of the tribe of Kinda specifically¹⁴³, and it appears that the practice was not unknown to the Meccans as Muḥammad mentioned the prohibition at the conquest of Mecca¹⁴⁴. This practice is one of the reasons given to demonstrate the inferiority of women in early Arabia, and its abolition is seen to be an indicator of their improved position under Islam. There appear to be two proposals for why girls were killed, though both point to the same conclusion, which will be discussed below.

There are several references to the practice of infanticide in the Qur'ān¹⁴⁵. These appear to be the source of traditional opinion about the practice amongst the Arabs. One explanation of the practice is that they were killed because there was a fear that they would be captured by an enemy tribe and dishonour would fall on the

¹⁴¹ Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam* (1992), p35. Under Roman law a man was required to raise all his sons but only one daughter.

¹⁴² Herodotus p479.

¹⁴³ Lisān al-ʿArab, w-ʿ-ḍ. In defining *maʿūda* as “a female child who is buried alive, Ibn Manẓur notes that this was a practice that the tribe of Kinda used to follow.

¹⁴⁴ When Muḥammad entered Mecca victorious in the year 630 CE / 8 AH, he addressed Hind bint ʿUtba with instructions about the behaviour of the women under Islam, one of which was not to kill their children.

¹⁴⁵ There are also references to infanticide in the tribal histories. For example, Ṣaṣaʿa, the grandfather of the poet Farazdaq of the Tamīm, is said to have ransomed the lives of baby girls condemned to death, and was thus known as *Muḥyi al-Mawʿūdāt*, or he who brings to life the buried girls (Nicholson, p243).

men¹⁴⁶. The following corroborates the theory that it was fear of shame which caused them to take this course:

when one of them receiveth the tidings of the birth of a female, his face remaineth darkened and he is wroth inwardly. He hideth himself from the folk because of the evil of that whereof he hath had tidings. Shall he keep it in contempt or bury it in the dust?¹⁴⁷

It is often assumed that the explanation of the practice is that of poverty¹⁴⁸. In times of want, which was most of the time, a girl was an unwelcome extra mouth for the tribe. She was an unproductive burden who would tie the tribe down by being pregnant or attached to children and therefore the fewer females the tribe had to deal with the better¹⁴⁹. The following āyāt express this idea:

Say, come I will recite unto you that which your Lord hath made a sacred duty for you: that ye ascribe no thing as a partner with him and that ye do good to parents and that ye slay not your children because of penury¹⁵⁰

and

Slay not your children fearing a fall into penury¹⁵¹

These two āyāt would seem to clearly state that it was the fear of poverty which drove parents to kill their daughters. Both of these should be considered in the context in which they were revealed. Regarding the idea that it was shame which caused the practice, it may be noted that the verse was revealed in the context of a diatribe against pagan Arab religious practice. Indeed, the previous āya to that given above is as follows:

¹⁴⁶ Esposito, 1975 p100.

¹⁴⁷ Sūra 16:58-9.

¹⁴⁸ Watt, *Muḥammad at Medina* p270 - see Qur'ān 6:151/2.

¹⁴⁹ Esposito, 1975 p100.

¹⁵⁰ Sūra 6:152.

¹⁵¹ Sūra 17:31.

And they ascribe unto Allah daughters - Be He glorified! - and unto themselves what they desire¹⁵²

This āya is an attack on the idea of Allah having daughters, i.e. the Banāt Allah.

Muḥammad, it seems here, was attacking the belief of the Meccans in the daughters of Allah by suggesting that it was unfair that they should let Allah have only daughters when they did not welcome the arrival of girl children.

The second set of āyāt claiming that it was poverty which led to infanticide have the problem that they contain the word *imlāq*, the meaning of which seems to be sufficiently obscure to the Arabs that it had to be explained at great length by al-Ṭabarī in his *Tafsīr*. This suggests that the word is being defined to give a meaning which suits a later interpretation of the verse¹⁵³. It has no relation to the root meaning of the word which is to flatter, to erase or to suckle. However, it may be that poverty was a factor in the practice, and this will be explored further below.

With either of these explanations, the underlying cause of female infanticide is attributed to women being a burden on their tribe either economically or socially. Neither of these proposed explanations seem to be wholly satisfactory. Women were certainly not unproductive members of the tribe, in fact amongst the nomadic groups women were often just as productive as the men as the tending of domestic

¹⁵² Sūra 16:57.

¹⁵³ It may be noted that the attempt in the *tafsīr* of al-Ṭabarī to prove that *imlāq* means poverty is problematic. He gives five examples of early commentators giving this definition of the word, which demonstrates that he was determined to provide over-riding proof of his choice of meaning (vol.xii p217, 14135-9). The evidence is however rather weak. The first is on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās (14135). The following example is on the authority of Qatāda, a student of Ibn ʿAbbās (14136). One might speculate that as the student of Ibn ʿAbbās, Qatāda might have received his knowledge from his teacher and thus it seems odd that he was his own authority. The next three examples are from even later commentators. If the standard meaning for *imlāq* was poverty, it seems strange that al-Ṭabarī would provide so much, yet very weak, evidence to support this definition. It may be that this was not the usual meaning for the word, or that the meaning was obscure at the time, even though it has now come to mean poverty. Lisān al-ʿArab offers no better explanation, as it takes its meaning for *imlāq* as poverty from the Qurʾān and cites the commentators for this (m-l-q).

livestock was often their duty and they were the domestic producers of the group. In a nomadic society, it seems that there were no 'useless' members of the tribe. As a consequence of their lifestyle, all members must have had their niche, a thing which they did for the good of the group.

Women also owned the tents of the tribe. They were the makers of the tents, weaving the coarse fabric from the hair of the goats and sewing together the sections¹⁵⁴. They were the ones who had the responsibility for the pitching and striking of the tents. That the women made the tents resulted in their owning the very tents in which the household dwelt¹⁵⁵. This too demonstrates that they were not entirely living as a result of the efforts of the men. Thus, it would appear that the women, even in this basic social structure, were very much an active, productive and powerful section of tribal life.

If the practice of infanticide was indeed some form of religious ritual, then as one sacrifices something of value not something of little consequence, then it may be suggested that rather than indicating the lack of importance of women to the society it may in fact be the reverse. To support the idea that the practice of infanticide was a religious practice comes the following revelation:

Thus their (so-called) partners (of Allah) made the killing of their children seem fair unto many of the idolaters, that they may ruin them and make their faith obscure to them¹⁵⁶.

This āya clearly indicates that the practice was concerned with the religious devotions of the parents. This also demonstrates that it was a practice only of the polytheists, and was not something done by the Jews or Christians of Arabia. Al-

¹⁵⁴ Cole, *Nomad of the Nomads* (1975) p64.

¹⁵⁵ Cole, p64.

¹⁵⁶ Sūra 6:138.

Ṭabarī verifies this statement as he states that it was the devils which people made partners with Allah who made the killing of their children 'beautiful to them'¹⁵⁷. He then goes further stating that it was specifically daughters which were those killed at the order of the 'devils'¹⁵⁸. It may also be noted that the āyāt preceding this verse discuss the practice of 'assigning to Allah a portion', i.e. that a quota of the tribes produce and livestock would be an offering to Allah. This seems to have extended to the offspring of the adherents of the cults themselves.

It may be suggested that the explanation of the practice as a religious ritual may be linked to the idea of poverty. If the Arabs practised infanticide in times of poverty, it would doubtless have occurred on a larger scale than the occasional female child, and one might expect to find references to mass slaughter of children in such times. The sources appear to offer no such examples. A perhaps plausible explanation of the practice as poverty related is that the tribes may indeed have killed children, on a small scale, out of fear of poverty because it was thought that the practice might prevent poverty befalling them. Thus what may be being alluded to in the texts is a prophylactic ritual. A further piece of evidence in support of this suggestion is from the tafsīr of al-Qummī¹⁵⁹. In his discussion of sūrat al-Naʿām he noted that the people gave their daughters as a form of blood-wit, that is, their lives were given in exchange for something¹⁶⁰, in this case it is suggested, the continued prosperity of the tribe. Human sacrifice, as noted above, was not unknown in the ancient world, including among other Semitic peoples in order to gain favour from

¹⁵⁷ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* vol. Xii p137, 13912.

¹⁵⁸ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* vol. Xii p137, 13913.

¹⁵⁹ Al-Qummī was a scholar from Qum who was an authority on the traditionist Kulaynī. He died at the turn of the third century AH thus predates al-Ṭabarī.

¹⁶⁰ *Tafsīr al-Qummī* vol. 1 p218. The crucial word here is *ghīra*, which refers to blood-wit.

their deity, thus it is not inconceivable that it might have been the case with regard to female infanticide¹⁶¹.

The social and economic explanations given above seem reasonable, and corroborated by the Qur'ān, up to a point. Muḥammad forbade the practice, and it may be assumed that part of this prohibition was because the practice did not fit in with egalitarian society where men and women were equal in the eyes of Allah as Islam is portrayed. Given his animosity towards the religious practices of the polytheistic Arabs it may be that the religious explanation has some value, and is as plausible as the generally accepted explanations.

Marriage and Divorce.

Marriage and divorce are two of the best indicators of the position of women in sixth and seventh century Arabia. It is also in this area that some of the greatest changes in Arab society at the time of Islam become apparent.

It would be easy to assume homogeneity of practice among all the tribes living in Arabia. Although the tribes would have had contact with each other and other societies to some extent, it is not impossible that as much as there was an exchange of ideas, there was a steadfast retention of their own ways of doing things. Therefore, while it may be seen that there was a particular system found in one tribe, that is no definite indication that it was generally employed unless this can be demonstrated to be the case.

¹⁶¹ It may also be noted that there is an example of a proposed human sacrifice in Mecca from the Muslim sources, that of 'Abd Allah, Muḥammad's father. This event will be discussed in some detail in chapter four of this work. It may also be noted at this point that human sacrifices to the goddess al-'Uzzā were also not unknown as is demonstrated in chapter five. It is not known whether the Arabs of Mecca and its environs practised such rituals although they certainly adhered to her cult.

The one factor which seems to be constant however, in all the forms of union described in the sources, is that women retained a high degree of independence in their affairs and choice of marriage partner. Literary commentators and historians seem to be mostly agreed on this point ¹⁶²and the sources appear to corroborate this theory. Ahmed notes that "sixth century Arabia formed, as it were, an island in the Middle East, the last remaining region in which patrilineal, patriarchal marriage had not yet been instituted as the sole legitimate form of marriage"¹⁶³.

The evidence for matrilineality and even for matriarchy has long formed a central theme within discussions of marriage customs among the Arabs. Robertson-Smith began the debate with the publication of *Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia* which suggested that several tribes were in their past, if not by the dawn of Islam, matrilineal. This hypothesis was seriously challenged by Spencer, who believed that there was certainly nothing to demonstrate a matriarchy and relatively little definite evidence of matrilineality¹⁶⁴.

However, even though marriage customs may have been flowing increasingly in a patriarchal, patrilineal direction, there is some evidence to show that the tribes were not wholly adherent to one system or another ¹⁶⁵. There are a number of

¹⁶² See introductory remarks on women in Arabia during this period above.

¹⁶³ Ahmed, p41.

¹⁶⁴ Spencer, "The Arabian Matriarchate: An Old Controversy", *SJA* 8 (1952). He also believes that this theory developed out of an erroneous belief in the universal primacy of matrilineality.

¹⁶⁵ Note Ahmed's earlier statement in which she claimed that Arabia at this time appeared to constitute the only part of the middle east not wholly patrilineal and patriarchal in social structure, though she does concede that change was on its way even here. Ehrenfels, noted that 'a wave of patriarchal culture had swept over Arabia shortly before (Islam) . . . particularly the northern provinces of Arabia and had already in pre-Islamic days been caught by this patriarchal trend ("Ambivalent Attitude to Womenhood in Islamic Society", *Islamic Culture* 1951, p76).

practices which are referred to as marriage in this period, a description of which is found in the ḥadīth¹⁶⁶:

‘Ā’isha wife of the Prophet told him [Urea b. Sober] of marriage during the Jāhiliyya of which there were four types: one which is of the people today, the man used to ask the man who was walī over the girl or whose daughter she was, to become betrothed to her and he gave her a dowry and he marries her. Another type was that the man would say to his woman ‘when you are purified from your period, send for so and so and have intercourse with him for the purpose of conceiving’ and her husband would stay away from her and go to her ever until she became pregnant. When her pregnancy was evident her husband would go back to her. This was done so that he might have a child of noble breed, and this was called *Nikāḥ al-Istibda*. Another type that a group of men would gather together, their number being less than ten, and they would all go into a woman and all of them would have intercourse with her. If she became pregnant then she would send for them and not a man of them could refuse not to come and when they were gathered together with her she would say to them, ‘you know what you have done and I have given birth to a child and it is yours so and so’, and she would name whoever she wished and her child would follow him and the man could not refuse to take him. The fourth type of marriage: many people would gather and all go into the woman and she does not refuse any who come to her, and they are the prostitutes and they used to fix flags to the doors as signs and anyone who wished could go in and have sexual intercourse with them. If one of them became pregnant and gave birth to a child all those men would be gathered together for her and they would call in a physiognomist then her child would follow the man who was his father and adhere to him and he could not refuse.¹⁶⁷

Even from this ḥadīth it appears that marriage was quite heterogeneous among the non-Muslims. The first type resembles that in Islamic law and needs no further explanation. The second type would appear to be rather peculiar if the society was patrilineal. However, if this was a practice of the Arabs, it is not discussed in any sources. If a man felt it necessary to send his wife out to another man to conceive a child, then it would have been a private matter and therefore not recorded in any

¹⁶⁶ This ḥadīth seems to refer only to the marriages of the polytheists, there is no evidence that other religious groups followed these customs.

¹⁶⁷ Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī, vol. vii chapter 37 p44-45.

chronicle. Thus while there does not appear to be any evidence to support it, it cannot be discarded either¹⁶⁸.

Watt believes that the second and third types of marriage indicated uxori-local marriage. He concluded this based on early poetry, saying "in the most romantic cases the man would only visit the woman at night and by stealth; in others he might reside with her tribe for a considerable period"¹⁶⁹. There may be some truth in Watt's theory, as it may have been the case then as today, that two or three households would set up camp together for a time and then separate¹⁷⁰. However, the difficulty with Watt's belief in uxori-local lineage patterns is that in this case the child would always stay with the mother's family, most specifically the mother's brother. The ḥadīth clearly shows that the child was expected to go after its father's family. It appears then that this type of marriage may not indicate uxori-local marriage at all, though that does not mean it did not exist, as will be discussed later. However, for Watt's argument to be valid, it would have to be the case that the households in his romantic commune would have had to stay together for the entire gestation period of the child.

The third and four types of marriage are problematic. The third type of marriage may have depended on the woman taking ten or less husbands or else be branded a prostitute¹⁷¹, while the fourth type of marriage she is clearly called such. It seems that the third type of marriage may be an attack on the loose bonds of

¹⁶⁸ Nawal al-Saadawi reported that in circumstances where a woman failed to conceive istibda marriage is practised in some countries based on a report by Ahmed Sarkiss (*Al-Zawg wa tatair al-mogtama*, Cairo 1967). She noted that in her own village women who wished to conceive but could not would go to the village sheikh who would give her a piece of cotton wool to insert in order to impregnate her and it was common knowledge that it was coated with the semen of the sheikh (*The Hidden Face of Eve* p128).

¹⁶⁹ Watt, *Muhammad at Medina* p379.

¹⁷⁰ Cole, *Nomad of the Nomads*, p64.

¹⁷¹ Termed *Zawaj al-mosharka* by al-Saadawi, p127.



marriage under tribal custom in which women appear to have had considerably greater freedom than they had under Islam. The fourth type may well be an accurate description of prostitution in Arabia as one might assume that this existed with increasing urbanisation¹⁷².

This ḥadīth, whilst offering a very clear description of non-Muslim marriage must be assumed to be somewhat inaccurate. While all of the systems of marriage described above may have existed, ‘Ā’isha’s description of them was certainly not based on personal experience, and also was seen from an Islamic perspective. Thus it is possible that it represents the Islamic interpretation of the marriage customs of the period. Also, the unions described in this ḥadīth do not represent marriage as it came to be known under Islam. ‘Ā’isha is referring here not to marriage in the Islamic concept, but to the forms of legitimised sexual union which were practised in the pagan communities of Arabia. Thus the term used by her, *nikāḥ*, refers not to marriage, but to legitimised union.

One of the features which comes across most clearly is ‘Ā’isha’s attempt to find a mechanism for determining paternity in every case. While tribal membership was important and latterly depended on the father, if matrilineality was practised at an earlier stage amongst the Arabs then this is less important.

Under Islam it became a punishable offence to claim a false father and while one might suggest that this was based on fraudulent inheritance claims, it may also have been in order to not claim a false tribal allegiance for expediency of tribal

¹⁷² Prostitution may well have existed, in addition to those marital unions considered illegitimate by later Muslims commentators. It is unlikely that prostitution was a feature of Bedouin life, but certainly sociological evidence points to it being a feature of urban life and patriarchalism (see Gerda Lerner, *Creation of Patriarchy* p6).

status¹⁷³. Donner wrote that bastard children were entirely acceptable as long as they did not attempt to ally themselves to their alleged father and join his tribe¹⁷⁴. The lack of need to prove paternity may appear surprising given the increasingly patriarchal society of the time, though this may be attributable to the honour of the child. At that time, it seems that the nobility of the person was derived from their lineage, and it was undesirable to have one parent of a lesser status than another. Thus, in order to avoid discovery of a genealogical skeleton, it was felt preferable not to know at all who the father may have been¹⁷⁵.

Robertson-Smith stated that "marriage, as we understand it now [presumably he means here marriage of an Islamic model], was already fully developed, at least, in the settled communities of the Hejaz"¹⁷⁶, which O'Leary uses to show that the 'early' type of marriage in which a woman stays with her own tribe and retains children was no longer practised by the noble women of Mecca¹⁷⁷. In part, Robertson-Smith is probably correct, in as much as it appears 'Islamic' marriage was known earlier, although it was only one of a few varieties of sanctioned union into which people could enter.

A demonstration of the possible change in attitudes occurring in the early sixth century CE is the marriage of Muḥammad's great -grandfather Hāshim b. 'Abd Manāf. He married a woman of Medina, Salmā bint 'Amr, one of the Banū 'Adiyy b.

¹⁷³ Ibn Hishām vol. 2 p409 (p186 in translation). It was said that on the ascent of Muḥammad to heaven he saw a vision of hell in which women were hanging by their breasts and they were those who had fathered bastard children on their husbands, and Ja'fār b. 'Amr said of this "they deprive true sons of their portion". Ibn Hanbal made several references in the Musnād to the great sin of claiming someone to be your father who was not.

¹⁷⁴ Donner, p288 footnote 49. He also noted that Thesiger found examples of illegitimate children living with their mother and were tolerated if they did not try to join their father's tribe.

¹⁷⁵ Donner, p288 footnote 49.

¹⁷⁶ Robertson-Smith, *Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia* p167.

¹⁷⁷ O'Leary, p191.

al-Najjār. This was her second marriage, and she agreed to it on the understanding that she would remain with her own people and retain her children "on account of her high position among her people"¹⁷⁸. It was also written that if she disliked a man she left him¹⁷⁹. Hāshim agreed to this, and she bore his son, ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib whom she named Shayba. It was not until after Hāshim had died that there was any attempt made to claim his offspring by the Quraysh back in Mecca. Once he was dead, a party from Quraysh went to Medina under al-Muṭṭalib and recognised his nephew. Here there is a divergence in the accounts given in Ibn Hishām and al-Ṭabarī. According to Ibn Hishām, Salmā was reluctant to let him go, in spite of his uncle's argument that he was old enough to travel and should be brought up with his own people who were of great reputation and power as well as being people of the temple. Shayba, it is said, refused to go with him without the consent of his mother, which she eventually gave¹⁸⁰. The al-Ṭabarī account is somewhat different. Al-Muṭṭalib saw the boy and when it was confirmed that he was the son of Hāshim, the men of the Banū ‘Adī b. al-Najjār said "if you want to take him do so now before his mother finds out. If she does find out she will not let him go and we shall have to prevent you from taking him"¹⁸¹. The Quraysh did take the boy, and it was not until nightfall that Salmā noticed he was missing and was told that he had been taken to Mecca¹⁸².

¹⁷⁸ Ibn Hishām vol.1 p13 (p58 in translation).

¹⁷⁹ Ibn Hishām vol.1 p13 (p58 in translation).

¹⁸⁰ Ibn Hishām vol.1 p13 (p59 in translation).

¹⁸¹ Al-Ṭabarī *Ta’rīkh* I p1083 (vol.6. p9, translation by McDonald and Watt), citing Ibn Ḥumayd, Salamah and Ibn Ishāq, he also gives the same account on the authority of Muḥammad b. ‘Umar (Al-Wāqidī).

¹⁸² Al-Ṭabarī here gives three solid isnāds for his account. (I. p1083 vol.6 p9 in Watt and McDonald translation). The one he gives based on Ibn Ishāq differs in some respects from that found in Ibn Hishām's recension. As the isnād of al-Ṭabarī is solid, it may be suggested that this is an example of Ibn Hishām adapting the original *sīra*.

One of the features of this story which is striking is that she was able to dictate the terms of the marriage to the extent she did. The account also implies that she had the right to separate from a man should she wish to, which confirms the idea that women in Arabia among some tribes had the right to divorce. It is stated that she had been married before, and this may have had an influence on her ability to conduct her own negotiations on the terms of her marriage, although according to Stern there is little to suggest that women needed a wālī at all until Islamic law made it a requirement¹⁸³. The circumstances of ‘Abd al- Muṭṭalib’s return to Mecca also bear some consideration. If the Ibn Hishām account is correct then it seems that the child was very much the property of his mother’s kin group such that permission had to be sought to remove the child. Under Islamic law the child is clearly under control of the father, even if the child is permitted to live with the mother until a certain age it is always the case that custody reverts to the father¹⁸⁴. Here it seems that the child could only leave with the permission of the mother, and that he was reluctant to go against her wishes. This may be attributed to his not wishing to leave his home and go with strangers¹⁸⁵ but it may also be that he was aware that his mother’s tribe was his guardian and to abandon them could mean abandoning his right to membership of that tribe and rights within it. If the al-Ṭabarī account is closer to the truth, it seems that the men of Quraysh who took the child back to Mecca seemed to be aware of their wrong-doing by their insistence that they leave quickly before the mother’s kin knew what was happening.

¹⁸³ Stern, *Marriage in Early Islam* p39.

¹⁸⁴ ‘Abd al-Raḥmān I. Doi *Shari‘ah, The Islamic Law* (1984) p214-215.

¹⁸⁵ He was only eight years old when this incident took place (al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh* I p1083, p9 in Watt and McDonald translation).

While this story does not wholly negate the belief shared by Robertson-Smith and O'Leary that such unions did not take place by the start of the Islamic era, as their statement was made primarily with reference to Meccans, it does show that there was some trace of an uxorilocal and possibly matrilineal system still in effect among some tribes by the sixth century. Children were not automatically the property of the father and his tribe should there be a conflict of interests. However, the story does reflect a changing attitude to paternity. Hāshim seemed to find no difficulty in allowing any offspring he may have had to remain with the mother's family, while only a few years later, his tribe were prepared to virtually kidnap a child who they believed to be of their people. In the Ibn Hishām account it is stated that they wanted 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib to be raised 'among his own people', thus suggesting that they saw him as a member of their tribe over hers. What is also intriguing about al-Ṭabarī's other version of the story in which the boy is taken is that it was with the apparent consent of the men of the tribe. They did appear to know they would be bound to try and keep the boy in Medina. It seems that the men of Salmā's tribe may have lost their adherence to the previous system but were still aware of it. Alternatively, the story may have been altered to show that it was necessary to steal the boy because of the incurred wrath of the maternal kin, and that the tacit permission of the men of the tribe was inserted to make it appear that the Quraysh were permitted in their actions.

Another story which may cast doubt on the analysis offered by Robertson-Smith and O'Leary is actually Meccan, and concerns Muḥammad's parents, Āmina and 'Abd Allah. There are three slightly different versions of this story. They contain the same motif, that of 'Abd Allah being propositioned by another woman on the

way to be married to ʿĀmina. However, the small differences in the stories are significant.

ʿAbd Allah was taken by his father ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib to be married to ʿĀmina, as it states in Ibn Hishām he was 'taken by the hand', which suggests that this was under the command of the family that he should enter into this marriage. As they passed the Kaʿba a woman asked where he was going. She is stated in two accounts to be the sister of Waraqa b. Naufal, though only al-Ṭabarī gives her name as Umm Qattāl bint Naufal¹⁸⁶. In another version of the story given by al-Ṭabarī, the woman is named Fāṭima bint Murr, a *kāhina* and convert to Judaism from the tribe of Tabalah¹⁸⁷. In all accounts the woman asked him where he was going. He replied that he was on his way to be married. She offered him as many camels as were sacrificed on his head to be with her which he refused saying that he could not act against the wishes of his father¹⁸⁸. In addition to this refusal of her offer, in the al-Ṭabarī version mentioning Fāṭima bint Murr, ʿAbd Allah recited the following verse:

As for unlawful relations I would sooner die and as for lawful marriage there
can be none as I clearly recognise
So how can that be which you desire?¹⁸⁹

Here ʿAbd Allah seems to be suggesting that whatever union she had in mind would be unlawful. However, once the marriage to ʿĀmina had been concluded he went back to her and she would have nothing to do with him, as in the other versions of

¹⁸⁶ Al-Ṭabarī *Taʾrīkh* I p1078 (vol.6 p5 translation Watt and McDonald).

¹⁸⁷ Al-Ṭabarī *Taʾrīkh* I p1079 (vol.6 p7 translation Watt and McDonald). On the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās.

¹⁸⁸ Ibn Hishām vol. 1 p156 (p68-9 in translation). This reference to camels which had been sacrificed on his head refers to an incident in ʿAbd Allah's youth when he narrowly escaped being sacrificed at the Kaʿba by his father. This story is discussed further in chapter four.

¹⁸⁹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh* I p1080 (vol.6 p7 translation Watt and McDonald).

this event. It is to be wondered what the difference was between the two occasions, given that he may not have been married on either occasion, if one accepts the Islamic belief that there were no non-Islamic marriages in the lineage of the prophet.

It is stated in all accounts that ‘Abd Allah consummated his marriage to Āmina and she conceived Muḥammad. He then left her presence and went back to the woman who had proposed to him. She did not repeat her offer and when asked why she no longer wanted him she replied that the light that had been with him was no longer there and thus she no longer needed him.

This account is very interesting as it demonstrates that the marriage of ‘Abd Allah to Āmina seems to have been based on family considerations rather than on the wishes of the couple to be married to each other¹⁹⁰. Also, the marriage appears to have been very brief, lasting only one night according to Ibn Hishām and three nights according to al-Ṭabarī. It would appear that it was a marriage of alliance for the two families, both from noble clans of Quraysh.

From the examples of marriage described in source texts, there does not appear to be any which took place without some sort of agreement between the persons concerned if not indeed their families. The tales told by the poets of women they had known, especially the anecdotes of Imru’l -qais, do not describe ‘marriages’. The poets themselves speak of them as courtly and daring, though it must be suggested that however illicit these flirtations and affairs may seem, they would surely have not stepped outwith the bounds of convention. Few poets were outlaws who cared little for social constraints, thus those who remained within their tribe would have been as subject to their customary practice as anyone else.

¹⁹⁰ It may be noted that in spite of the apparent lack of marital life between the couple evident in the sources, Āmina in fact died on her way to visit the grave of ‘Abd Allah, which may suggest some continued relationship.

Therefore, to brag of their exploits in violation of their custom would have been highly improbable, and it is unlikely that they could have committed such acts in the first place. The poet too was perhaps even more bound by the tribal custom, as, as will be demonstrated in chapter four, the poet held a prestigious place in tribal Arabian society.

A good individual example of a woman and her history of marriage which demonstrates the freedom women had is that of Hind bint ‘Utba b. Rābi‘a¹⁹¹. Her first marriage was to Ḥafs b. al-Mughīra b. ‘Abd Allah b. ‘Amr b. Makhzūm with whom she had a son, Aban¹⁹². It may have been that there was another marriage before she wed Abū Sufyān, to Fākih b. al-Mughīra the Makhzumite, the uncle of Khālīd b. al-Walīd. This marriage may not have been successful given that Fākih suspected Hind of infidelity claiming to have seen a stranger leaving her private apartment and repudiated her. Hind's father, ‘Utba, offered to have him assassinated for accusing her falsely, but ultimately they went to a Yemeni kāhin for judgement in the matter. The kāhin pronounced Hind innocent, and also foretold the birth of Mu‘āwīya. Fākih wanted to take her back once her innocence was proven, but she refused him¹⁹³. This story is of interest because it shows that her family supported her once repudiated, and were determined not to have Hind's honour besmirched by his accusations. This may have been out of a need to protect their honour by proving her innocent. The husband in this anecdote, Fākih, appears to be a brother or half—brother of the first husband judging by the account in Ibn Sa‘d. They both

¹⁹¹ Hind bint ‘Utba was the daughter of ‘Utba b. Rābi‘a b. ‘Abd Shams b. ‘Abd Manāf, her mother was Safīya bint Āmina b. Ḥāritha b. al-Waqs b. Mara b. Hilāl b. Falaj b. Thakun b. Bohata b. Salim.

¹⁹² Ibn Sa‘d vol.8 p235.

¹⁹³ Abbott, “Women and the State on the Eve of Islam”, *ASL* p269 citing ‘Iqd al-Farīd iii p273, Agh 12/ 50.

have the same father's name and are of the same clan. It may be that one or other source was incorrect in the name of the husband, or that he was known as both, but neither appear to be nicknames by which he may have been alternatively known.

Her next marriage was to Abū Sufyān b. Ḥarb, and from this marriage came her most famous offspring, Mu'āwiya, the founder of the Umayyad dynasty. The story of this marriage demonstrates that Hind was able to control her own affairs, which one may have expected even under the stricter Islamic system given that she was a divorcee by this stage. Her father suggested two husbands for her. The first one was noble, good tempered and he would follow her in her decisions and she would have control over his property. The second was also noble, but he dominated his family and was jealous, quick-tempered and never defeated in conflict. Hind chose the second as she thought he was a more suitable husband for a free noble woman and worthy of bearing a child to. She asked to be married to him quickly and not in an 'obsequious manner'. Thus she was married to Abū Sufyān ¹⁹⁴.

In addition to the two marriages which it is claimed she contracted, it is also suggested that she had conducted other affairs. According to one source, she was involved with four Qurayshites, any one of whom could have been Mu'āwiya's father. The three named are Abū Sufyān, 'Umāra b. al-Walīd and Musāfir b. 'Amr. Šibṭ al-Jauzī named the fourth as al-'Abbās b. 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib¹⁹⁵. While this would seem to be an attempt to attack Mu'āwiya by questioning his parentage, it may be that if there was a system of marriage found in this period which permitted multiple partners as 'Ā'isha's ḥadīth suggests, there may be more truth in this than meets the eye.

¹⁹⁴ Ibn Sa'd vol. 8 p 166.

¹⁹⁵ Kister and Plessner, "Notes on Caskel's Gamharat an-Nasab" *Oriens* 25-6 (1976) p64.

After her conversion to Islam, Hind is known to have written romantic poetry to a young poet, Naṣr b. al- Hajjāj b. 'Ilāt al-Tamīmī . This was believed to have taken place during the caliphate of 'Umar b. Al-Khaṭṭāb, because when 'Umar heard the verses recited to this young man he had his head shaved and exiled¹⁹⁶.

Another example of marriage among non-Muslims is that of Fāṭima bint 'Utba b. Rābī'a, who, like her sister Hind appears to have been quite aware of their rights. Fāṭima was married several times, including once to Salīm, a client of her brother, Abū Ḥudhayfa. This marriage may corroborate the statement made regarding Khadija that Quraysh married their allies (see below).

One of her other recorded marriages was to 'Aqil b. Abī Ṭālib¹⁹⁷. This marriage was not successful, as related by Ibn Sa'd;

When he ['Aqil] went in to her, she used to say, 'Where is 'Utba b. Rābī'a? Where is Shayba b. Rābī'a?' One day he went into her and he was annoyed. She said "Where is 'Utba? Where is Shayba?" He replied, 'On your left when you enter the fire'. She tightened her garment around her and said, 'My head and yours may never be joined'. She went to 'Uthmān and he sent Mu'āwiya and Ibn 'Abbās. Ibn 'Abbās said 'By Allah I will not part them'. Mu'āwiya said, 'I would not part two elders of the Banū 'Abd Manāf.' They went and brought them together and put things right between them¹⁹⁸

Reasons for marriage among the Arabs appear to have been partly based on romantic notions of a person making a good spouse, and it seems if the poetry is to be believed, that love appeared to come into the equation as well. As Kinany suggested in his thesis on ghazal poetry, would the Arabs have written amorous poetry to women if they were worthless chattels and mere slaves?¹⁹⁹ However, over and above these more normal reasons for marriage, it seems that marriages could

¹⁹⁶ Abbott, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri*, vol. 3 p46.

¹⁹⁷ The older brother of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib.

¹⁹⁸ Ibn Sa'd vol.8 p168.

¹⁹⁹ Kinany, p26. His answer to this is obviously not. He goes on to discuss the chivalrous nature and attitude of the poet (p41-57).

take place to help with intertribal relations. With regard to the first marriage of Khadīja bint Khuwaylid, it is said that her husband was from the Tamīm, and that their marriage took place because "the Quraysh would marry their allies"²⁰⁰. This feature of Quraysh marrying with allied tribes indicates perhaps that marriage links served to strengthen the ties between the two groups, which might further indicate that the offspring of such a union did not belong solely to either. This would have been a way of securing peaceful relations between two tribes²⁰¹. While it appears that latterly children may have been named according to the lineage of the father, the lineage of the mother was of no small importance. As one's tribal affiliations set the place of the individual in society they were remembered and used. For example, Muḥammad was able to draw on his maternal connection to a tribe in Medina for security after the Hijra²⁰².

It seems that some kind of formal arrangement may have been required to allow even temporary tribal affiliation enabling a non-member of the tribe to reside within the group. Even today, it appears that men cannot live alone with other men, and single men cannot live alone, they must be attached to a household within a group, and the household is based in the tent which is the property of the most senior woman²⁰³. It also appears that there may have been a custom in South Arabia until recently of a guest in a tribe being offered an unmarried female of the tribe for the duration of his time there. This does not appear to have been regarded in any

²⁰⁰ Ibn Sa'd vol. 8 p 14. For a study of Khadīja's marriages and life before Muḥammad, see "The Sons of Khadīja", M.J. Kister, *JSAI* 16 (1993).

²⁰¹ Lerner proposed the inter-tribal exchange of women was a way to avoid constant war by cementing marriage alliances (p212-3).

²⁰² Muḥammad's paternal great-grandmother was from Medina (see notes above on the marriage of Hāshim).

²⁰³ Cole, p70.

way as improper, and no girl would be given to anyone not of her social class²⁰⁴. It may be that this custom, if it extended at any time outside South Arabia may have been what Doughty encountered on his travels when his host kept offering him wives.

If entering into such relations in order to have some tribal affiliation however brief was required, this may also go some way to explaining the peculiar statement ascribed to the men of al-Tā'if after their city was conquered. It is said that they were unwilling to accept a prohibition on all but 'Islamic' style marriage as they were merchants and needed the right to commit zinā²⁰⁵. The term zinā is often used to imply adultery, though it simply means any sexual relations which are not legal under Islam and one presumes the custom of the tribe. Given the great place honour had in the society, for an unlawful relationship to occur, both parties would likely be risking a great deal. However, if their idea of what was legal was not identical to the Islamic idea, then this would perhaps explain why they did not see anything overtly wrong in what they were doing. Also, if as merchants, they travelled among tribes other than their own, it may have from time to time been required of them to enter into relations of a temporary nature in order to facilitate their business arrangements. The idea of committing zinā was anathema to the society before Islam. On one occasion, Hind bint 'Utba went to Muḥammad, after her conversion to Islam, and informed him of Abū Sufyān's faults and Muḥammad concluded his discussion with her saying that she must not commit zinā, to which she replied, "Does a free woman fornicate?"²⁰⁶, which demonstrates that no matter how

²⁰⁴ Dostal, "'Sexual Hospitality' and the Problem of Matrilineality in Southern Arabia", *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 20 (1990), p17/8/9.

²⁰⁵ Ahmed, p43.

²⁰⁶ Ibn Sa'd vol. 8 p 167.

unacceptable in Islamic terms early marriage customs were they were not seen as being in any way wrong or immoral, indeed, as Hind said, no free woman would engage in anything which was not permitted by custom.

A degree of freedom of choice on the part of women still appears to have been exercised into Islam. The women of the elite could expect to marry on their own terms, for example Sukaina, who was able to initiate a divorce and insisted on quite strict conditions for her marriage to another man. It is believed that she demanded that he have no wife other than her, would never interfere with her actions and desires and that she could live near her friend Umm Manzur²⁰⁷.

In the matter of divorce, in the case of some of the marriages of which there is record there does not appear to have been a complex rule for the termination of a union. While there may have been some rules governing divorce, there is little evidence of them. It may have been that in the case of those marriages which were of a designated duration, the ending of the predefined time period signalled a divorce. There is also the famous account of the method by which a woman might divorce her husband as follows:

The women in the Jāhiliyya, or some of them, divorced their men, and their manner of divorce was that if they lived in a tent they turned it round so that if the door had faced east it now faced west . . . and when the man saw this he knew that she had divorced him and did not go to her²⁰⁸

This description of a divorce suggests that the tent belonged to the woman not the man, a fact borne out by research referred to earlier, and also that the man lived with the woman and her kin, implying uxori-local residence. There appears to have been very little ceremony attached to this divorce and there seems to be no mention

²⁰⁷ Ahmed, p77, taken from Vadet "Une personnalité féminine du Hejaz au I/VII^e siècle: Sukayna, petite-fille de 'Alī" *Arabica* 4 (1957).

²⁰⁸ Agh. 16/106.

of any degree of responsibility on the part of the man towards the woman after the divorce. This may suggest that in the event that there were any offspring they were the responsibility of the woman and her family, again, the implication here is of matrilineal, uxorilocal marriage having existed among some tribes in the pre-Islamic period.

Women were able to marry anyone they chose, with little reference to the tribe, although social considerations of honour and status would have been taken into account. It also seems that women married to form alliances for the benefit of the tribe. Thus marriage appears to have been a system of alliance formation as well as a social construct based on the need for legitimised sexual union.

It may also be stated that though a society displays a degree of matrilineality women may not necessarily have a higher status than under patriarchal systems. Male dominance and low social status can still exist within a matrilineal framework just as under a patrilineal system. However, in the case of Arabia at this time, in spite of the movement in favour of patrilineality in the tribes, the status of women does not appear to have been particularly affected as yet.

Trade and Culture

The areas of trade and culture may perhaps be taken as indicators of the role played by women in society. The former demonstrates the ability of a woman to have a degree of independence. If she was able to own property and do with it as she wished then it may be asserted that she was not totally under the control of a dominant male. It must be stated that a certain level of financial independence does not equate with true emancipation, as the society was one where ones allegiance to ones kin was all important, but the fact that women could control their own affairs and the extent to which this was the case may perhaps show something of their

perceived ability to think and act as rationally as any male and take care of themselves.

Cultural expression should also be considered as an indicator of the place of women in society. There appears to have been to some extent a general belief that high culture and intellectual achievement are the preserves of men, whilst women are relegated to 'natural', more low level achievement²⁰⁹. This distinction serves to show that in some societies women were not considered capable of the same level of thought and intellectual faculty as men. If it appears that women were active participants in whatever cultural life there was in the society of the time, then here would be perhaps another point of determining the relative level of sexual equality, or alternatively, gender specialisation.

It is accepted that women in Arabia were able to trade and own property. Khadīja bint Khuwaylid is probably the best-known example of this from the Islamic histories. The account of the circumstances of her marriage to Muḥammad makes it clear that she was a woman of considerable independence and wealth, who was able to employ men to work for her.

Another example of a woman contracting a marriage with a man who she would make responsible for some of her affairs as an employee is Fāṭima bint ʿUtba. Her ill-fated marriage has been noted above, and according to Ibn Saʿd, she married ʿAqil b. Abī Ṭālib on condition that he became responsible for her property and that she would give him a salary²¹⁰. This arrangement suggests that Fāṭima was a wealthy

²⁰⁹ Sherry Ortner in 1974 argued that women were universally regarded as being closer to nature than to culture, and as every culture strives to rise above nature they are therefore attempting to rise above womanhood. Her argument is that women's biology places them closer to nature and the social role resulting from this places them lower in the cultural process. There was also some belief in her biology giving her a 'psychic' link with nature. (Lerner, p25). Ahmed also points out that androcentric theories also suggest that women have been inferior due to their biology (p11).

²¹⁰ Ibn Saʿd vol.8 p168.

woman in her own right, and in fact this marriage has an undertone of a business arrangement.

From this it emerges that men appeared to encounter no difficulty in being employed by a woman to perform a task on her behalf. Entering into this relationship in which the man would appear to be to some small extent subordinate would demonstrate that there was not a sharp gender inequality in commerce. In the two examples given the men were poor and had no choice but to take employment as offered. Muḥammad, it is known, was from a relatively impoverished branch of Quraysh and was forced to seek a living outwith his family concerns. As for ʿAqil, he was from the same branch of the family. It may also be proposed that his marriage to her was a way to make it more socially acceptable for him to be in her employ.

Other women of this period also appear to have engaged in trade, such as Asmāʾ bint Mukharriba, who Crone speculated was in Najrān trading, as she was not a native of that region and there was no other reason for her to be there²¹¹. Also, Hind bint ʿUtba appears to have traded into the reign of ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb²¹².

One of the most important members of Arabian society of late antiquity appears to have been the poet. As has been discussed in the introduction above, poetry and its composers were held in high regard by their tribes and great rivalry appears to have existed between them. Indeed there were poetry competitions held among the tribes, for example that held at Ukaz, famous no doubt in part because a war was started as a result of an incident which took place there.

Women poets were not unknown, and were often very respected. The most famous women poet known from the sources, and it is often suggested, finest, was

²¹¹ Crone, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* p123.

²¹² Crone, p133. Hind borrowed 4000 dinars from that treasury and took it to trade with the tribe of Kalb in Syria.

al-Khansa. She was the daughter of ʿAmr b. Shurayd, chief of the Sulaym tribe, and in addition to her poetic abilities, she appears to have been a woman of nobility and character, as the following story demonstrates. Al-Khansa was tending to a sick camel of her father when she was seen by Durayd b. aṣ-Ṣimmah, chief of the Banū Jushām and he fell in love with her. He went to ʿAmr and asked to marry her, to which he was told she was spirited like no other woman and while he could suggest the match the decision was hers. ʿAmr put the idea to al-Khansa within earshot of Durayd who heard her say that she would not leave her fine young cousins to marry a man who would soon be an owl, i.e. would be dead before too long. Durayd heard this and was angry and wrote a poem rebuking her for her bad taste. Al-Khansa's kinsmen tried to make her compose verse in her defence, but she replied that she had rejected his suit, which was enough and she would not satirise him as well²¹³.

It has been suggested by Jones that women composed only funeral verse, and that they unlike other poets, had no 'muse' but were inspired only by grief. It is true that eulogy was seen to be the special preserve of women, and the nawh or lament was always performed by a woman²¹⁴ and that the ritha, or elegy poetry composes the vast majority of recorded output²¹⁵. The issue of poetic inspiration will be discussed later in chapters three and six, as will the ritual element of women's poetry, but the truth of that statement regarding the poetic output of the women shall be briefly discussed here. This seems to be somewhat inaccurate, as while indeed, much of the verse which remains of poetesses is eulogising poetry, that was not their only skill. Indeed, the anecdote about al-Khansa shows that she must have

²¹³ Lyall, p42-3.

²¹⁴ O. Wright, 'Music and Verse' p437 from *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period* from the Cambridge History of Arabic Literature Series.

²¹⁵ Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals Speak*, p161.

written other poetry as she was urged to do so by her kin, something which would not have happened had it not been acceptable for her to do so.

Honour.

Honour was a matter of great, almost inestimable importance to the Arabs. It was the code by which the people lived in the absence of religious or written secular law²¹⁶. Honour appears to have demanded bravery, loyalty and generosity as the principal values by which to live. Bravery in the defence of one's tribe and property was seen as bravery in the defence of honour itself. Loyalty was of supreme importance in a society where tribal affiliation was a basic component of society. The knowledge of one's place in society, and the responsibilities and rights which accompanied it was all important, and one was expected to demonstrate loyalty to the body that allowed you to have social legitimacy. This loyalty was shown, and expected, from all attached to the tribe, even those whose attachment was temporary, including strangers living with the tribe²¹⁷. Generosity too was of enormous value among the Arabs. Even one's enemy could expect hospitality for a limited period.

Conclusion.

As stated earlier, the view taken of the life of women of the early Arab world is polarised between those who saw it as a liberating force, holding up the introduction of regularised inheritance rights, regulation of marriage and prohibition of female infanticide as examples of this against those who saw it as a

²¹⁶ Nicholson, p82.

²¹⁷ Nicholson, p83.

negative force which denied women the level of social interaction to which they had been used.

It seems from a brief consideration of the early Muslim community compared to the rest of Arabian society at that time, that Islam was a double edged sword for women. Indeed, it would appear that they did gain certain rights legally, obviously the prohibition on infanticide can be seen as a positive innovation, however rare the practice may have been.

However, it appears that women did lose certain rights and freedoms they had previously had, and the extremely patriarchal nature of Islam may have, albeit unintentionally, removed from women some of their voice in society. The prohibition on certain types of religious activity, which will be discussed in chapter four, was perhaps one of the greatest blows to women in Arabia. It must also be said, that initially in the Muslim community, the life for women did not change radically as has been suggested. Women certainly did lose some of their ability to control their own lives. The right to divorce at will was certainly a loss, and as time went on it may be said that this loss was felt even more keenly. Freedom in marriage also appeared to diminished, though under Islamic law the position does not appear to have changed that radically, in as much as it may be suggested that the involvement of a senior male seemed to be increasingly common for a marriage to take place, though the extent to which this was the case is unclear. That both Khādīja and Hind sought male assistance in the contraction of marriages may suggest that the situation was rather fluid. It thus seems that social change was underway, Islam perhaps acted as a catalyst for that change rather than the initiator. The often perceived image of the Arab woman who has no rights, veiled and submissive is not perhaps one that would be recognisable from the early community.

It may be that the increased occultation and diminishing of women's place in general society was to some extent a later interpretation, some would suggest distortion, of the Sharī'a.

This chapter has demonstrated that women at this time in Arabia were in a position to influence the behaviour of their men. They also had considerable personal freedom, within the constraints of their society, in which to act. They had not only a fair social status with the men, but also were active members of society in business and cultural life. The women had a great responsibility for the honour of the tribe and were keenly aware of the need to preserve this. That they were actively involved in this suggests that they were not considered lesser beings in their society. This comparative equality with their men must have resulted in their having greater leverage over their behaviour than was the case latterly under Islam. It is this social position of power and influence which will be of great importance in the next chapter, in which the roles of women in tribal conflict from a social perspective will be considered.

Chapter Three.

Women at War : Supporters and Leaders.

This chapter deals with women in warfare from a non-religious perspective considering their roles during warfare in both their more usual role in the encouragement of their men and also as attendants bringing men water and tending the wounded. The few instances of women in more active roles as warriors and leaders will also be discussed.

The active participation of women in war in 6th century Arabia may seem an unlikely prospect from a twentieth century vantage point where the issue of women combatants is an unresolved and controversial issue. However, women do appear to have been involved in fighting in other cultures through history. Quale defined this as occurring in three specific circumstances²¹⁸. She divided them into defence / police forces at a royal court e.g. the bodyguard of the sultan of Dahomey; celibate armies consisting solely of women e.g. the legendary Amazons ; celibate male impersonators e.g. women who dressed as men in order to pursue feuds or to act in the stead of dead brothers or sons.

Without wishing to completely negate everything she wrote, in as much as her examples appear valid, she is not entirely correct. Starting with the last example, while male impersonators may have existed this is likely to have been exceptional and somewhat legendary. To some extent the same may be said for the second example of the celibate armies dedicated to their warring. While it is not denied that they may have existed, the idea that this was a definable group leads to a

²¹⁸ Quale *A History of Marriage Systems* (1988), p34.

conclusion that only by a denial of femininity and an attempt to be as male as possible in dress and being celibate could one be a warrior. It is perhaps a patriarchal theory that a woman being a woman could not fight as well as a man. The first example of a defence force attached to a royal court is so limiting as to be almost meaningless. Women may have acted as 'police' and a sort of civil defence in other societies, and certainly there are examples of women in Arabia fighting to defend their homes and property in a way which cannot be termed 'active combat' in as much as they were simply protecting that which was theirs and were not there to fight. This theory, which appears to be the only anthropological approach to women in war in a pre-modern context, ignores the idea that women could have been put to any kind of supportive role which may have involved a degree of self-defence if not active combat. Indeed, Quale states herself that situations of women being in armed combat is unusual. It can be demonstrated that in Arabia it was not only commonplace, but an important part of tribal solidarity.

It is perhaps the place of women in the arena of warfare which is one of the most alluded to yet unexplored facets of female existence in the Arabia of antiquity and early Islamic society. It is not a new and radical statement to declare that women could be, and often were, present during armed conflict, but the reasons behind it are rarely stated. When an explanation is offered, women's behaviour is usually attributed entirely to their role as an inspiration for the men. This reason is not untrue, and as will be demonstrated the exhortations of women were a driving force in many a campaign. However this answer is only part of the whole story, a large part perhaps, but women also existed as leaders and fighters in their own right and performed functions on the battlefield other than shouting encouragement.

Although the activities of women will often be divided into those of non-Muslims and Muslims, it will become apparent that there is often little difference between the two groups in terms of what they actually did. Often the rationale behind it may not have been very different either, in spite of Muḥammad's wish to dispense with the hot-headed bursts of emotion and vengeance regarded as implicit in the character of the 'Jāhiliyya'.

What is clear is that women played an enormously important part in the whole ritual of war for the tribes. For the more casual raids, it seems that booty and captives were the two main objectives, captives being especially valuable if they were women²¹⁹. A formula verse calling men to war contains the line, "List ye for stately foals, for virgins?"²²⁰. The capture of women of another tribe was a source of much pride and satisfaction for the warriors, such as the men mentioned in al-Ḥārith's mu'allaqa²²¹:

²¹⁹ Meillassoux argues that as a result of the comparatively high incidence of death in childbirth women had to be procured from another tribe and this constant theft of women led to warfare and in the process warrior culture emerged. This led to women being regarded as possessions and their reproductive capacity was seen as a tribal resource (Lerner p49). Meillassoux' theory is interesting in this context as he attributes the entire warrior culture to the need to maintain tribal sex ratios. This appears to be in contradiction with the practice of infanticide which has been argued was to control female numbers. It seems a very complex society that indulges in a system of killing girl babies to be rid of the responsibility and then go and steal other tribe's women to replace those lost. There may be some truth in his argument that women were valued captives because of their reproductive value, but this would be a feature only of patrilineal society where the lineage of the mother was less important than that of the father as stealing a woman to bear children for the tribe and thus swell their ranks would be pointless in a matrilineal system. As there is some evidence to suggest matrilineality in Arabia, it may be proposed that his argument may be incorrect for this context. The other interesting feature of his argument is that it is in opposition to the traditional Engels theory. Meillassoux seems to be claiming here that control of sexuality preceded private property and contributed to it. The aspect of women as valuable captives has received considerable attention by Lichtenstädter and will not be dwelt on here (see Lichtenstädter p.20-38).

²²⁰ Lichtenstädter, p21 citing Caskel p47.

²²¹ Al-Ḥārith, son of Hilliza was said to be of noble birth, and was also said to have been a leper. Modern scholars have suggested that his ode was inferior to the other six of the Mu'allaqāt, Nöldeke suggested that it was included because he delivered a counterpart to the ode of 'Amr b. Kulthūm, each poet being on opposite sides of the Bakr - Taghlib rivalry (Arberry, *The Seven Odes*, p210-216, also Nicholson p113).

when we strained our camels from the palm trees of al-Baḥrain until al-Ḥiṣa brought them to their goal, then we swerved against Tamīm and by the truce months had in our hands the daughters of Murr as handmaids²²²

This extract also mentions the truce-months, referring to the sacred months of the Arabs in which no fighting was undertaken. The poet also hints at the fate of the women who were captured, a shame that the women's fellow-tribesmen would have found most dishonourable. This shame of the captive women suggests that if captured they would inevitably be given away as slaves /wives to either the men who had captured them or other men of the tribe. It is interesting that in literature the women who were captured were never in any real danger from their captors as it was a narrative convention that the women would remain virgins so that they could marry the hero who saved them²²³. This would appear to be in contradiction to the experiences of the captured women in historical narratives where they would possibly not be touched if their function was as a hostage, but otherwise would be given to the men of the tribe. The literary model though is interesting as it implies a completely different fate and makes the capture and rescue motif into a myth which it may be suggested the people would consider reasonable behaviour. No stories or myths existed without a purpose, and it may be assumed that there was some point to this.

It was not, however, customary to kill women. In Lichenstädter's study of women in the ayyām literature, she could only find one example of a woman being

²²² Muʿallaqa of al-Ḥārith, trans. Arberry.

²²³ *The Arabian Epic*, Lyons p41. The perhaps supreme example of a virgin warrior queen from literature was Qannāṣa, who in spite of having married several of her captive men was still a virgin when she was finally married to the only man to have ever defeated her in combat. This is obviously a literary myth which may or may not be based on historical events, though it seems to be representative of a social demand rather than an accurate portrayal of historical fact. Indeed, the motifs of the story seem entirely to reinforce patriarchal values. See also "Warrior Women in Arabic Popular Romance: Qannāṣa bt Muzāḥim", Remke Kruk, *JAL* 25 (1994).

killed, and there does not appear to be any evidence contrary to this. It seems that killing women in battle was frowned upon, in addition to which they were much more useful as hostages or as captive wives²²⁴. Meeker noted in a recent example that when some women of the Rwala were killed in a battle against the Fed'an it was seen as "a heinous violation of the Bedouin conventions of warfare"²²⁵. This was probably a remnant of tribal practice, given Lichtenstädter's analysis and lack of evidence to the contrary. It later became an Islamic injunction, as Muḥammad said it was wrong to kill women in raids. It is narrated that a woman was killed on an expedition of Muḥammad²²⁶, but he himself disapproved of killing women and children and indeed forbade it in several traditions²²⁷. This prohibition appears to have applied even to the women and children of the non-Muslims. It is said that when asked about the permissibility of killing non-Muslims on night raids he said it was permissible provided that it was not deliberate, by which he is thought to have meant that if it was so dark that one could not tell if the victim was male or female

²²⁴ The danger of losing one's women and having to pay a ransom for their return is considered by the Meccan army prior to the battle of Uḥud in an interesting anecdote from al-Wāqidī. Here, the forces were camped at al-Abwā', and some men suggested that they exhume the grave of Umm Muḥammad and keep the bones as a ransom in the event of the loss of the women (Āmina was buried at al-Abwā' where she died on her journey to visit the grave of 'Abd Allah). If they should win the battle, they would hold the bones to ransom instead. It was Abū Suyfān who rejected this idea, saying that the Muslims might unearth their own ancestors in retaliation (vol.2 p205).

²²⁵ Meeker, p55. The wars between the Rwala and the Fed'an are believed to have taken place between 1877-1900.

²²⁶ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim vol. iii, Kitāb al-Jihād wa'l-Siyar chapter DCCXI 4319, on the authority of 'Abd Allah. The same tradition appears in Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī, vol. iv. Book of Jihād, no. 147 p158 on the same authority.

²²⁷ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim vol. iii Kitāb al-Jihād wa'l-Siyar chapter DCCXI 4320, on the authority of Ibn 'Umar. This tradition also appears in Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī, vol. iv Book of Jihād no. 148 p158 on the authority of Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm - Abī Aṣ-Ṣamiṭ - Ubayd Allah - Nafi' - Ibn 'Umar. There is also the incident in which Khālīd b. al-Walīd killed a woman and had to be reminded not to kill women and children, which indicates that this must have been law by the year 8 A.H. (Ibn Hishām vol. 4 p458-9, p576 in translation).

then it could be overlooked²²⁸. The Islamic ruling in general appears to be that women, children, the sick and religious devotees may not be killed, only actual combatants may legitimately be put to death²²⁹. This rule appears to have its origin in non-Muslim practice and could be another example of Islam adopting and legalising an existing Bedouin tradition.

So, if women were a prime objective of a raid or battle, then obviously their protection was of enormous importance to the men of the tribe. The obvious question at this point must be why they did not leave them in a safe place if they knew danger was at hand. It would seem logical to leave them somewhere where they could be guarded and save the warriors from the additional pressure of their defence. Indeed, a man of the Banū Tamīm is recorded as saying "Follow my orders and do not allow the women to approach the line of battle, for there are those who would try to escape and think of abandoning the women"²³⁰. Of course, for the nomad, this was not always an option, as they did not perhaps have a safe place to leave them, other than to send them away to a safe distance under the protection of a warrior of the tribe who was specially entrusted with their care. A safe distance could mean that they were taken to high ground from which they would be able to see the fighting but were out of range of the weapons, which Sells believed to be the traditional Bedouin custom²³¹. Or that they were taken away from the area

²²⁸ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim vol. iii Kitāb al-Jihād wa'l-Siyar chapter DCCXII 4321, on the authority of Sa' b b. Jaththama. (see also 4322,4323) . Also in Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī vol. iv Book of Jihād no.146 p158 on the authority of Sa' b b. Jaththama. This tradition may have interesting possibilities with regard to the massacre of the Shiites at Karbala where women were killed along with the men.

²²⁹ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, vol. iii Kitāb al-Jihād wa'l-Siyar footnote to Chapter DCCXII 4321 p 947.

²³⁰ Ibn Al-Athīr vol. i p466

²³¹ Sells, *Desert Tracings* (1989)p103. It seems that there were instances of women being sent away to high ground nearby for the duration of the fighting, but even in these examples of wishing to keep the women away from harm they were still within sight and sound of the battle and could thus be relied upon for encouragement or vilification of the warriors.

altogether, as in one case, the 'Aus left their women in their fortifications, a rare option for the warriors²³².

However, even if the women could be left elsewhere or sent off to a safe haven for the duration of the battle, this would be irrelevant in the event of a raid, which is by its very nature a surprise attack and therefore no opportunity to send them away would have arisen. In the event that a town or fortification was attacked, it appears that the women helped defend the town rather than hiding. After the battle of Uḥud, the Muslims were afraid that the Meccans would attack Medina, and discussed what would happen in such an event. It was said that “the men will fight them face to face, and the women and boys will hurl stones at them from above”²³³. This echoes a similar description of the women and children of an unnamed town in South Arabia who, when attacked hurled stones from above onto the heads of their attackers²³⁴.

It seems that instances of women being kept away from the battles were quite rare, and even when men had the option to leave them at home, it seems that they often preferred to take them with them. One of the reasons for this would have been because the women could perform necessary back-up functions for the warriors, bringing them water, tending to the wounded and so on. The other main reason would be in order to encourage the men to bravery. It is these two reasons which will now be considered.

²³² Ibn Al-Athīr vol. i, p504. There is one example from the early Muslim community in which the women were left in the fortifications of Medina during the battle of the Ditch (Ibn Hishām vol. 3 p220 and p226, p452-3 and p457 in translation).

²³³ Al-Ṭabarī *Ta'rikh* I, p1388 (vol.7 p108 translation by Watt and McDonald).

²³⁴ Beeston, *Warfare in Ancient South Arabia* p. 12. These events took place in the second or third century CE.

The Typical Experience of Women in Warfare- Tribal Support and Auxiliary Staff.

The two most usual roles for women in battle will be demonstrated to be to encourage the men, prevent them from displaying cowardice and thus dishonouring the tribe, and also to supply the men with water and to look after the wounded. This continued into the Muslim era, and is noted in the ḥadīth and other histories.

The women of the tribes felt that they were entitled to the full protection of their men. They appear to have been keenly aware of the importance of honour in their society, not only of their personal conduct, but that of their men, and how the honour of each individual was contributory to that of the tribe.

As was noted in the previous chapter, it is difficult to overstate the value the Arabs placed on honour. It was a matter of great honour for the men not to be seen to be cowardly in front of the women of the tribe. This incentive was undoubtedly a powerful force for the men, and it can be seen from their exchanges that they were keenly aware of not wishing to be seen as less than entirely brave in the eyes of the women, even if it meant putting themselves at great risk.

The odes contain several references to this wish to be seen as fearless warriors. 'Antara²³⁵ recited the following verse after a battle against Qais b. Dhobian of the Yemen;

²³⁵ 'Antara b. Shaddād is a character who appears to be part poet and part legend, thought to have been born in the middle of the sixth century. One of the features of 'Antara which is best known is that he was mulatto, being the son of an Arab tribesman and a black slave girl, Zabība. He was not recognised as a legitimate son until he had proved himself to be a great warrior (Arberry op cit p148). His ode appears to show his great skill as a warrior, and is the only one of his poems to survive complete (EI² s.v. 'Antar). He distinguished himself for his ability to fight during the war of al-Dāḥis (Nicholson p114). He was said to have died fighting against the tribe of Ṭayyi' (Nicholson p115). From his life developed the legendary 'Antar of the Bedouin romance, *Sirat 'Antar*. The hero of the epic is based on the poet, taking his lineage. The main features of the tale are his great skill as a warrior and his love for 'Abla. The stories of 'Antar the poet and 'Antar the hero have been fused together by the work of the storytellers (EI² s.v. 'Antar - Romance of)

Oh by my life, Honour and glory are for him who hurls himself into battle
 with a pure heart,
 In battle are the highest honours to be won.
 Let him fight with a firm heart, let him wield his sword and spear undaunted
 by calamity
 Or else lead a life of ignominy and shame with no rewards from the maidens
 and no mourning
 From his friends and family when he must die

The shame and dishonour that would be brought on the husbands if they failed to
 protect their women and they were captured were perhaps added to by the threats
 of the women that they would have nothing to do with them if they failed in their
 duty;

Upon our tracks follow, fair ladies, noble ladies that we take care shall not
 leave us nor be insulted,
 Litter-borne ladies of B. Jusham b. Bakr who mingle with good looks, high
 birth and obedience
 They have taken a covenant with their husbands that, when they should meet
 with signal horsemen, they will plunder mail-coats and shining swords and
 captives fettered together in irons
 When they fare forth, they walk sedately swinging their gait like swaying
 tipplers,
 They provender our horses saying 'You are not our husbands if you do not
 protect us'
 If we defend them not may we not survive nor live on for anything after
 them!²³⁶

This extract shows clearly that the women were present among their men in litters, a
 feature which will be discussed further in chapter six. The women also appear to
 have taken responsibility for the plunder. Most notably here though, is that the
 women stated that if they felt their honour had not been sufficiently defended by the

²³⁶ Mu'allāqa of 'Amr b. Khulthūm, trans. Arberry. 'Amr became chief of his tribe, the Banū Taghlib, when he was only fifteen, but is best known for his poetry. He was descended from another poet, his mother being the daughter of the warrior poet Muhalhil (Nicholson p109). His Mu'allāqa is almost all there remains of his work, and it is regarded as one of the finest examples of poetry from this time, al-Mufaḍḍal regarded his one ode as equal to one hundred odes of a lesser poet. 'Amr is also known for killing 'Amr b. Hind, king of al-Ḥīra (Arberry p185-191).

men they would no longer consider them their husbands. This verse echoes in sentiment if not in actual wording, those recited by other women in their situation (see chapter six) who also recited verses containing the lines ;

advance and we embrace you, retreat and we separate,
a separation with no loving

From poetry of Umm ʿAmr bint Waqdash, mother of the warrior poet ʿAmr b. Maʿdī Karib and his sister poetess Kabshah, comes the following verse²³⁷;

If you will not seek vengeance for your brother,
take off your weapons
And fling them to the flinty ground
Take up the eye pencil, don the camisole,
Dress yourself up in women's bodices!
What wretched kin you are to a kinsman oppressed!²³⁸

This poem suggests that to fail in the avenging of a murder the men cease to be men. What is apparent from these verses is that failure to defend the women or fight bravely before them threatened the men with loss of their wives if married or lack of gaining a wife if not.

Rabīʿa b. Mukaddam had the honour of being known as *hami al-zāʿina* or protector of the women. Rabīʿa was from the Banū Fāris, a branch of the Kināna and therefore allied to Quraysh. The story goes that strife broke out between his tribe and the Banū Sulaym when a Sulamī man was killed. Although peace was achieved between the two, when people of the Fāris were found on land belonging to their foe, it appears that the action was seen as hostile. Rabīʿa was escorting a group of women from his tribe, including his mother and sister, and they had halted at Dhū ʿAsāl when Rabīʿa saw a cloud of dust approaching them. Fearing that it was an

²³⁷ The verse here is from a genre called *taḥrīḍ* which will be explained further in chapter six.

²³⁸ Stetkevych, p196. This poem is entitled 'Take up the Eye Pencil' and is from the *Hamāṣa* of al-Marzuqī, no.671.

enemy party, he ordered the women to ride off quickly towards territory of their tribe where they would be safe. He would stay behind and defend them giving them time to get away if indeed the group approaching were unfriendly. He began to ride towards the dust cloud, and the women said, "Rabī'a has fled and left us" and his own sister said,

O deed of shame! O deed of shame!
A man deserts his women folk
While still the blood flows full in his veins!

to which he responded

Sayst thou sister, I am one to quail ?,
Hast thou not known me join with spear and sword,
And bring back my blade red with men's life blood?

There followed a fight between Rabī'a and the men of Nubaishah of Sulaym.

Nubaishah stabbed Rabī'a and he retreated to where the women had hidden, and asked his mother to bind his wound with her veil which she did. He then got back on his horse, and rode towards the men of Sulaym, but when his mare reared he fell off dead. A man of Sulaym went over to his body and said, "God curse thee! Verily thou hast defended thy women both alive and dead!". The women reached their own tribe safely and a party set out to bury his body²³⁹.

Lichtenstädter speculates that the story which describes his heroic deeds must have been invented²⁴⁰, and she may have come to this conclusion as a result of the death scene being appropriated by the author(s) of the *sīra* of 'Antar²⁴¹. Certainly

²³⁹ This account of the story of Rābī'a is taken from Lyall's *Ancient Arabian Poetry*, where it was given as a commentary to the eulogy spoken over his grave by Ḥafṣ b. Al-Aḥnāf of Kināna. The translations of verse and all other quotations are his translations (p55).

²⁴⁰ Lichtenstädter p67.

²⁴¹ Lyall, p58.

the tale shows great bravery, but this does not necessarily mean that it is pure fabrication, even if it has been exaggerated and become the stuff of legend in another context.

At the battle of Uḥud the Quraysh took women with them to fight²⁴². While this battle provides evidence of another possible significance of women in battle which will be discussed in chapter six, for now the more traditional roles of the women will be noted. Three noblemen of Quraysh took their wives with them to Uḥud; Abū Sufyān took Hind bint ʿUtba and Āmina bint Saʿd, Sufwān b. Umayya took Narza bint Masʿūd and al-Bafum bint al-Muthal, Ṭalḥa b. Abū Ṭalḥa took Salafa bint Saʿd²⁴³. The function of their women appears to have been, as far as the texts make the reader aware, to encourage the men. As Ibn Hishām relates;

So Quraysh marched forward with the flower of their army, and their black troops, and their adherents from the Banū Kināna and the people of the lowland, and women in their howdahs went with them to stir up their anger and prevent their running away²⁴⁴.

The greater significance of this scene will be fully discussed later, but at this point it is sufficient to note that the women were there in a traditional supportive role.

At Uḥud, the women were grouped together and were not active participants in the fighting, apart from one specific incident concerning Hind (see below) .

Indeed, al-Wāqidī states that according to Umm ʿUmāra the women of Quraysh did

²⁴² Al-Wāqidī vol.2 p 202 (also p 225, 229, 272, 266, 286/7 refer to women being present at Uḥud). However, it appears that some of the men were afraid to take the women with them for fear that they would lose and the women be captured. However, the women, especially Hind, reminded them what had happened on the day of Badr and was determined to see that it did not happen again (al-Wāqidī vol.1 p202).

²⁴³ Al-Wāqidī vol.2 p202. If any other men took their wives with them they are unnamed.

²⁴⁴ Ibn Hishām vol.3 p62 (p371 in translation). The translation given above is from Guillaume, and is rather free. The expression which he translates as 'the flower of the army' is in fact in the Arabic text a description of the fortitude and decisiveness with which the Meccans marched into battle, with no mention of flowers whatsoever. The Arabic text refers to the women as *thuʿn*, a term which has been noted specifically refers to women in litters.

not kill anyone on that day, and she did not see one of them shoot an arrow or throw a stone²⁴⁵, only that they were playing their tambourines and reminding their men of the humiliation of Badr²⁴⁶. The most interesting part of this account shows the Meccan women appearing to humiliate their men should they try to retreat. Whenever a man tried to run away, they would plait his hair and apply kohl to his face saying "you are a woman!"²⁴⁷. So here there appears to be a practical example of the kind of treatment a warrior could expect if he was seen by the womenfolk of the tribe to be being a coward and therefore neglecting his duties as a protector of themselves and tribal honour. In this behaviour they appear to be fulfilling the threats issued in the poem of Umm 'Amr quoted above.

The method of encouragement employed by the women appears to have consisted mostly of chanting verse and mocking any man displaying cowardice. However it seems that the women also used nudity to encourage the men. For example, during a fight on Yaum Iyād one of the women of the Banū Salīṭ, Umm Dardā was said to have been seen running naked before the army²⁴⁸.

A similar example is found from a battle between the Bakr and the Taghlib, in which the poet and mercenary Find al-Zammanī is known to have taken his two daughters to war with him. Find was a member of the Banū Shaybān, a subset of the Bakr b. Wā'il. He rode at the head of a substantial mercenary army of his kinsmen in support of the Bakr. The two young women ran about the field of battle, and the first one removed her clothing and chanted verse, followed by her sister²⁴⁹.

²⁴⁵ Al-Wāqidī vol. 2 p272.

²⁴⁶ Al-Wāqidī vol. 2 p272.

²⁴⁷ Al-Wāqidī, vol. 2 p272.

²⁴⁸ Lichtenstädter p42 and Doughty vol.2 p474. Lichtenstädter is quoting from the Naqā'id of Jarīr and al-Farazdaq, 583. I.

²⁴⁹ Agh.20/144.

It might be suggested that standards of modesty among the women of this time were less than that of the later Muslim women, and thus this ritual disrobing was of no great significance. However, one of the battle days of the Figar war was started because a young woman would not show her face so the young men of Quraysh pinned her dress up at the back and so dishonoured her. Thus it appears that appropriate dress was important to the Arabs. While modesty was a virtue most of the time, it appears that in specific circumstances a degree of nudity was permissible if seen to be in the best interests of the tribe, which in this case was the incitement to acts of greater bravery. This ritual disrobing appears to have remained a part of the participation of some women in warfare until modern times²⁵⁰. There are numerous descriptions of women in battle in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries baring their breasts to the warriors whilst chanting stirring verse, for example,

Loosen the plaits of thy hair,
Loosen them;
And uncover thy breasts
Altogether²⁵¹

It seems that in a great deal of the war-chants which have been preserved, the uncovering of the breasts and the loosening of the hair go together. It may be that the uncovering of the hair was a metaphor for nudity, and that the expression in the texts of loosening their hair and allowing it to fly freely was symbolic of the state of undress and immodesty of the women if covering the hair was normal practice for

²⁵⁰ Although there are numerous examples of women even recently removing their clothing, there are a number which do not, and thus it appears that stricter modesty laws had begun to apply. For example, Jaussen's description of a girl seated in a litter from his *Coutumes du Pays Moab* (p174) does not describe her as naked in any way, rather that she is elaborately clad. Her hair is still left loose though, which itself is perhaps indicative of her relative immodesty and thus act as an incentive to the men.

²⁵¹ Alois Musil's description quoted by Morgenstern p21 ff 33. Musil recorded numerous battle-cries of a similar nature.

post-pubescent girls²⁵². This symbolic undressing may also have been indicative of sexual availability in the case of the unmarried women should the warriors acquit themselves well in the fighting.

A late example of women being taken to war in order to encourage the men to fight in their protection is the battle of Hunayn in 630 CE /8AH. When Mālik b. ʿAuf led the Ḥawāzin against Muḥammad he brought the wives, children and possessions of his men with him²⁵³. When they made camp at ʿAuṭās, among the men who gathered there was Durayd b. aṣ-Ṣimmah. He was astonished to hear the noise of camels, sheep and children at the encampment and asked what was going on. He was even more astonished to discover that it was the families and livestock of Mālik's men. Mālik explained to him that his purpose in bringing them was that the men would fight to the death in their defence. Durayd spoke out against this course of action, suggesting that the men send their families to safety so they would not risk capture. At this suggestion Mālik called him an old fool and refused to discuss the matter any further²⁵⁴. It happened that the day went against the polytheists and the women and children were captured and distributed as booty among Muḥammad's men²⁵⁵.

Another example of a woman criticising the behaviour of a man for his failure to protect his household comes from the day of the conquest of Mecca. Hind bint ʿUtba referred to her husband, Abū Sufyān, as a 'fat greasy bladder of lard' and

²⁵² Descriptions of the normal dress for women suggest that even among the now relatively "liberal" dress of the Bedouin, women covered their hair with a kerchief or shawl. For example, Musil, *Manners and Customs of the Rwala Bedouins* p565.

²⁵³ Al-Ṭabarī *Ta'riḫ* I p1654 (vol.9 p2, translation by Poonawala).

²⁵⁴ Ibn Hishām vol.4 p437 (p566 in translation). The account in al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'riḫ* I p1656 (vol.9 p4 in translation by Poonawala) is derived from Ibn Ishāq.

²⁵⁵ Al-Ṭabarī *Ta'riḫ* I p1655 (vol. 9 p3 translation by Poonawala).

urged the advancing Muslims to kill him as he had failed to protect the city and its people²⁵⁶.

Women were also taken into battle to perform auxiliary tasks which may have included responsibility for the care of the dead. It is said that Ḥalima, the daughter of al-Ḥārith, perfumed 100 champions and clothed them in shrouds of white linen and mail on the day when the Ghassanid cavalry attacked Mundhir.²⁵⁷ An example of the women of the tribe performing the functions of water bearers and also showing what may have been a post battle task for the women is a well-known story, that of the Bakr against the Taghlib on the Yaum Ṭaḥaluq. Al-Ḥārith advised the Bakr as follows;

Fight them with your women. Equip each woman with a small waterskin and give her a club. Place the whole body of them behind you - this will make you more resolved in battle and wear some distinguishing mark which they will recognise.

The strategy of the B. Bakr was to give the women water skins to bring the water to the men and their presence would make the men more resolved in their fighting. The men of the Bakr were also supposed to shave their heads in order to make themselves distinguishable to their women, so that if they fell in battle the women would know to tend them with water and help them out of danger to treat their wounds. As for the men whom they could not recognise, the women were to kill them²⁵⁸.

²⁵⁶ Ibn Hishām vol.4 p404-5 (p548 in translation).

²⁵⁷ Nicholson, p50. Taken from Freytag Arabia Proverbium vol. II p611.

²⁵⁸ Nicholson, p59.

On that day a warrior of the Bakr, Jahdar b. Ḍubay'a thought that shaving his head would disfigure him so he decided not to, and inevitably he was wounded and instead of treating him, a woman of his tribe clubbed him to death²⁵⁹.

The protection of the women in non-Muslim society at this time was thus a matter of no small importance. The motivation for this may be in part to enhance their own status and to know that they had acquitted themselves well. By defending the honour of their women and sparing them this dishonour of capture and the fate that awaited them if they were, the men also defended their own honour and thus the tribe was kept noble. The honour of the men and the women of the tribe appear to be intimately connected, as would be expected, given that the concepts of honour and shame were equally pertinent to both.

There is one example of role reversal from late Antiquity which shows women protecting men. Abū Uzyhir al- Dausī was killed by Hishām b. al-Walīd in an argument over a dowry. Dirār b. al-Khaṭṭāb b. Mirdās al-Fihrī went with a group of Quraysh into Daus country and came to the house of Umm Ghaylān, a free woman of the tribe²⁶⁰. The men of Daus wanted to kill the Quraysh because they had killed one of their tribesmen and they felt that his death had not been properly compensated for, but Umm Ghaylān stood up for the Quraysh and prevented the Dausites from killing them²⁶¹. Upon this Dirār recited the following lines,

Allah reward Umm Ghaylān and her women well
For their coming without their finery and with dishevelled hair²⁶²
They saved us at death's very door
When the avengers of blood came forth

²⁵⁹ Nicholson, p59.

²⁶⁰ Ibn Hishām vol.2 p414 (p190 in translation) notes that her job was to comb women's hair and to prepare brides.

²⁶¹ Ibn Ḥabīb, *al- Munammaq* p 241.

²⁶² Dishevelled hair is a traditional sign of grief.

Why Umm Ghaylān would have defended the Qurayshites against her own tribe is obscure. Ibn Hishām suggested in his notes that Abū Ubayda said the women who defended Dirār was Umm Jamīl, the wife of Abū Lahāb, but also though it possible that it may have been both²⁶³. They were able to address the issue of a continued feud and perhaps here were acting as peace makers to try and stop the fighting from escalating. What may be seen here is an example of women taking a pro-active role in conflict resolution, and it appears to be a capacity in which they were able to act as their actions appear to have been successful. Interestingly, the admonition of the fighters by Abū Sufyān prior to this incident had little effect.

The role of women as auxiliary staff on the battlefield whose concerns were principally the supply of water and the tending of the wounded was certainly one which was valued by the tribe. It is logical that the women would have been involved at this level if they had not been permitted to enter into a more robust area of the fighting itself. The tribes of Arabia had a social structure which meant that all persons in the tribe had a place and a function and as warfare was a common part of their lives it is therefore not surprising that they had a part to play in that too.

This idea was transferred into the structure of the Islamic community and it appears that their position was viewed with similarly high regard, as this ḥadīth demonstrates:

‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb distributed clothes among some of the women of Medina and there remained a nice woollen garment and some of those who were with him said, “Oh chief of the Believers, give it to the daughter of the Messenger of Allah who is with you” referring to Umm Khulthūm bint ‘Alī and ‘Umar said “Umm Ṣālīt has more right to it than she” and Umm Ṣālīt

²⁶³ Ibn Hishām vol.2 p415 (p190 in translation).

was from the Anṣār who had pledged allegiance to the Messenger of Allah. ‘Umar said “She used to carry water skins for us on the day of Uḥud”²⁶⁴.

There are several other ḥadīth which show the Muslim women actively involved in the support of their army in battle, e.g.

Anās reported that Muḥammad used to allow Umm Sulayma and some other women of the Anṣār to go to war with him in order to tend the sick and bring water²⁶⁵. Anās also reported that at Uḥud he saw Umm Sulayma and ‘Ā’isha bint Abū Bakr carrying water skins on their backs and they would pour water into the mouths of the people, then go back to the wells, fill up the sacks and return to the fighting once more to give out water²⁶⁶.

Al - Rābī’a bint Muawidh said that ; We used to take part in holy battles with the Prophet by providing the people with water and serving them and bringing the killed and the wounded back to Medina²⁶⁷

The idea that the women were there in order to spur the men on to greater bravery was also one which was well known in the Muslim camp. The need to protect the women was also felt by the Muslim warriors, as ‘Abbās b. Mirdās said after the victory of Hunayn:

Many a woman whom our prowess protected
From the hardship of war so she had no fear²⁶⁸

It is known that Muḥammad would himself take one of his wives on each expedition he made. The wife who would accompany him was chosen by lots, and would be carried in a litter²⁶⁹. One notable occasion on which ‘Ā’isha bint Abī Bakr

²⁶⁴ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim vol. v p273 ,21. It may be borne in mind that ‘Umar may not have wanted to give it to Umm Khulthūm as she was his wife, and may have been seen as favouritism.

²⁶⁵ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim vol. iii p1001DCCXLIX 4454.

²⁶⁶ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim vol. 3, p1001, DCCXLIX, 4453-4455. Al-Bukhārī gives an almost identical account of the same tradition, though he includes the additional line about being able to see the ankle bracelets of ‘Ā’isha and Umm Sulaym as they were hurrying with their water skins (Ṣaḥīḥ al- Bukhārī, vol. iv no. 65 p83 .

²⁶⁷ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, vol. iv Book of Jihād no, 133 p87. A similar tradition is given on the authority of Rubayya bint Mu’awidh, who it might be assumed was her sister.

²⁶⁸ Ibn Hishām vol. 4 p462 (p578 in translation).

²⁶⁹ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, vol. iv, Book of Jihād, no. 64 p83.

accompanied Muḥammad later became known as the Affair of the Lie and gave rise to the prophetic ruling on matters of adultery.

The Affair of the Lie took place in 628 CE /6 AH. In her own recollection of the affair, ʿĀ'isha stated that Muḥammad would take one of his wives with him whenever he went on a raid. He would allow them to draw lots amongst themselves to decide whom he should take, and on this occasion it was ʿĀ'isha. She was taken on the raid on the Banū al-Mustāliq, after which the party returned to Medina. On the way back, Muḥammad announced that they would stop for a while . When the party was about to set off again, ʿĀ'isha went off to relieve herself, and when doing so she lost her necklace of onyx beads which she went back to look for. She found her necklace, but in the meantime, the people had gone. So, she lay down wrapped in her jilbāb and waited for them to come back for her, sure that they would notice her missing. The men who were responsible for her litter may not have noticed she was not in it when they lifted it up to be put back on the camel after the break because, according to ʿĀ'isha in those days women only ate enough to keep alive and did not grow heavy through eating meat. Therefore she was so light that the men could not tell whether she was in the litter or not.

While she was waiting, Safwān al-Muʿttāl al-Sulamī passed by and he recognised her. He picked her up and they tried to catch up with the party but could not. When she returned to Medina she was unwell, and although she was ill she noticed that Muḥammad was behaving coldly towards her and so she asked to go home to her parents to be looked after. Muḥammad told her she could do what she liked. One night she went out with Umm Miṣṭaḥ to attend to their needs, she told her that she was the subject of speculation among the community because she had

returned with the warrior separately from the party of Muḥammad. Muḥammad asked other people about her character and eventually came to see her. When he was there she pleaded her innocence and Muḥammad received a revelation confirming her innocence and he had those who had spread gossip about ‘Ā’isha flogged²⁷⁰.

This was not the only occasion on which Muḥammad took a wife with him as he is said to have taken Umm Salama on such an expedition and also some women of the Anṣār who were there to supply water and tend the wounded²⁷¹. Muḥammad had two of his wives with him at the siege of al- Ṭā’if, and thus one may assume that they had been at Ḥunayn which immediately preceded the siege. One was Umm Salama bint Abī Umayyah and al-Ṭabarī claims that the second wife, who is unnamed in Ibn Ishāq, was Zaynab bint Jaḥsh²⁷². It is said that they each had their own tents and he would pray between them²⁷³. There were also other women accompanying the party²⁷⁴.

A relatively late example of women accompanying the Muslim army on a campaign is from the invasion of ‘Ammurīyah by Maslamah b. ‘Abd al-Mālīk. It was related that he took his wives with him on campaign, as did the other men of his

²⁷⁰ Ibn Hishām vol.3 p297-307 (p493-99 in translation) and is on the authority of ‘Ā’isha as is the version in the ḥadīth thus demonstrating the acceptability of the Ibn Hishām recension of Ibn Ishāq. Al-Ṭabarī *Ta’rīkh* I p1518-1525 (vol.9 p57-63 translation by Poonawala) gives an account based on that of Ibn Ishāq. See also Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, vol. iii, Book of Witnesses, no. 829 p504-6. Bukhārī observed that ‘Ā’isha was less than fifteen years old at the time of this affair.

²⁷¹ Sunān Abū Dā’ūd, trans. A. Hasan p702, no. 2525, on the authority of ‘Anās. Professor Hasan notes regarding this that women went on Jihād with the men principally to perform the auxiliary tasks of supplying water and tending the wounded, but could fight if necessary (footnote 1890).

²⁷² Al-Ṭabarī *Ta’rīkh* I p1671 (vol.9 p22 translation by Poonawala), Ibn Hishām vol.4 p483 (p589 in translation). Although Ibn Ishāq does not name the second wife, he does state that there were two of them present.

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ See below for the account of Khuwayla bint Ḥakim.

army. As Maslamah was passing through the ‘Aqbāt Baghras on a narrow road, a woman fell from the litter in which she was being carried down the side of the mountain. Maslamah subsequently ordered that all women should thereafter go on foot and that the valley should be known as ‘Aqbāt an-Nisā’. Al-Balādhūrī wrote in his account of these events that the Banū Umayyah used to take their women in order to infuse enthusiasm in the army by making them jealous for their women²⁷⁵.

Women were present at the invasion of Cyprus. When the island was invaded for the first time by ‘Ubadah b. al-Ṣamīt, he took his wife, Umm Ḥaran bint Milḥān, with him. Sadly, on their arrival she was given a mule to ride from which she fell when it stumbled and she was killed. Her tomb in Cyprus is known as the tomb of the Righteous Woman. Her desire to be part of the fight for Islam is recorded in two ḥadīth. In the first, it is written that Muḥammad was often a guest in her home and she would cook for him and check his hair for lice. On one occasion, Muḥammad fell asleep and when he awoke he told Umm Ḥaran that he had dreamt who off his followers would be fighters for Allah. Umm Ḥaran said that she prayed that Allah would make her among them and Muḥammad told her that she would be and her death as a result of falling from her mount is recorded²⁷⁶. The second ḥadīth is in a chapter dealing with women going to sea, and it mentions her desire to be a fighter for Allah. Interestingly, it states that she sailed with Mū‘āwiyah’s wife Qazārah²⁷⁷, implying that they were present on the same expedition. This contradicts the sequence of events in al-Balādhūrī which suggested that Mu‘āwiyah and his wife did not go to Cyprus until a later expedition²⁷⁸. Whichever chronology is correct, it

²⁷⁵ Al-Balādhūrī, *Futuḥ* p167.

²⁷⁶ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, vol. iv Book of Jihād, p38-9.

²⁷⁷ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, vol. iv Book of Jihād.

²⁷⁸ Al-Balādhūrī, *Futuḥ* p154.

seems to be the case that wives were certainly included in the expedition. That Mu'āwiyā's wife was with him is not surprising as it seems she was quite active on behalf of her husband. She is said to have sent gifts to the Byzantine emperor, which, if she had no high position at court would be improbable²⁷⁹. That she did this at all perhaps indicates something of the power women retained within society until the middle of the seventh century. It is known that there were other women at the conquest of Cyprus, such as the slave girl of 'Abd Allah b. Qays²⁸⁰. By this time, it seems that while women were still being taken on campaigns, they were not taking an active role as they may have been in the early battles between the Muslims and the polytheists.

This continued to be the case among Bedouin warfare until certainly the last century when women could be found in a semi-combative role in this example from Doughty:

The Anayza housewives were coming forth to the battle driving asses and gurbies. They poured out water for the thirsty fighters; and took up the wounded men²⁸¹

The need to protect the women of the Muslim camp was felt just as greatly by the Muslims as it was by their enemies. For example, when Mujja'ah's tent was attacked he was inside it with Umm Tamīm, and he shouted at the man, "Stop! I am her protector and what an excellent, noble-born woman she is! Attack the men!"²⁸².

The Muslim side also had no qualms about capturing women from other tribes and treated them in much the same way as was the normal custom of the time, that is, the women were shared out like booty amongst the warriors, either to become hostages or wives. For example, when the Muslims defeated the Banū

²⁷⁹ Al-Ṭabarī *Ta'rikh* I p2823 (vol.15 p28 translation by Stephen Humphreys).

²⁸⁰ Al-Ṭabarī *Ta'rikh* I p2825 (vol.15 p29 translation by Stephen Humphreys).

²⁸¹ Doughty, vol. ii p461.

²⁸² Al-Ṭabarī *Ta'rikh* I, p1943 (vol.10.p118 translation by Donner).

Hanīfah, Muhakkam said “Oh company of Banū Hanīfah, now the noble born women will be carried off unwillingly behind riders as captives and will be taken as wives without being requested in marriage”²⁸³. The women and children of the Banū Qarayza were also shared out as booty²⁸⁴, which demonstrates that this was a fate which could also befall those of the ‘Ahl al-Kitāb as well as the polytheists.

Women in Fighting Roles- As Warriors and Leaders.

While the role described above for women was certainly the most common in the sources for Muslim and non-Muslim women, both groups could and did fight.

One of the most renowned women ever to emerge in battle for both the Muslims and non-Muslims was Hind bint ‘Utba. Hind is an interesting character, she appears at many of the major events of early Muslim history. She is best known as the wife of Abū Sufyān and mother of Mu‘āwiya founder of the Umayyad dynasty. Although Hind has already been mentioned as being one of the women taken into battle by her husband, and it is also known that she and a group of women were present at Uḥud in particular, singing and shouting at the men²⁸⁵, she appears to have taken an active fighting role herself. Nawal al-Saadawi goes so far as to claim that she wore armour and carried a sword²⁸⁶. At Uḥud she was in the thick of the fighting, it is said that Abū Dujāna saw someone in the midst of the warriors

²⁸³ Al-Ṭabarī *Ta’rīkh* I vol. p1944 (vol.10 p119 translation by Donner). There are many other examples from the conquests.

²⁸⁴ Ibn Hishām vol. 3 p244 (p466 in translation).

²⁸⁵ While the women of Quraysh were noted above to have participated in exalting their men to be brave, this aspect of her activity in battle will be discussed in greater detail in chapter six.

²⁸⁶ Al-Saadawi, p125. The source for this information is given as *Muhammad the Prophet of Freedom* by ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sharkawī (Cairo 1967 p171). This source used by Saadawi has not been checked as it was unavailable for consultation, therefore the authenticity of this information cannot be ascertained. No alternative reference for this has been found and thus the claim may be viewed with circumspection.

shouting and screaming, and he went to kill that person and raised his sword above their head but just in time he realised that it was a woman and turned away from her²⁸⁷.

The event at Uḥud often related with regard to Hind involves the infamous affair of Ḥamza and his liver²⁸⁸. Hind approached Uḥud with revenge on her agenda as she had lost her father, brother and son at Badr three years previously²⁸⁹. After the battle of Uḥud had gone with the Meccans, she and her women went among the Muslim dead and mutilated them, taking their ears and noses to make necklaces and anklets²⁹⁰. She then ripped open the body of Ḥamza, the uncle of Muḥammad and tore out his liver, which she attempted to chew but spat out²⁹¹. She then climbed onto a rock and recited rajaz poetry. However, Hind did not herself kill Ḥamza, he was killed by the lance of an Abyssinian slave, Waḥshī who was promised his freedom by his owner, Jubayr b. Muʿṭim, if he succeeded in killing him²⁹². Hind may not have killed Ḥamza, but she certainly encouraged Waḥshī, as it is said that “every time (she) passed by Waḥshī, or he passed by her, she would say “Go to it,

²⁸⁷ Ibn Hishām vol.3 p69 (p375 in translation).

²⁸⁸ Ibn Hishām vol. 3 p91-2 (p385 in translation) al-Ṭabarī *Taʾrīkh* I vol.1 p1415-6 (vol.7 p129 translation by Watt and McDonald). The al-Ṭabarī account is on the authority of Ibn Ḥumayd, Salamah and Ibn Ishāq.

²⁸⁹ Al-Wāqidī vol.2 p272.

²⁹⁰ Al-Wāqidī vol.2 p274, Ibn Hishām vol.3 p91 (p385 in translation), al-Ṭabarī *Taʾrīkh* I p1415 (vol.7 p129 translation by Watt and McDonald).

²⁹¹ Ibn Hishām vol.3 p91 (p385 in translation). Guillaume remarked in his footnotes to this episode that the eating of the liver was a survival of prehistoric animism, as it was once believed that eating this passed on the strength of the dead person. Al-Ṭabarī *Taʾrīkh* I p1415 (vol.7 p129 translation by Watt and McDonald).

²⁹² Jubayr b. Muʿṭim's uncle, Tuʿayma b. ʿĀdi was killed at Badr and by killing the uncle of the Prophet Jubayr would have had his revenge. Waḥshī was freed for killing Ḥamza, but was forced to flee when Muḥammad conquered Mecca. He retreated to al-Ṭāʾif, but Muḥammad caught up with him there and in order to avoid death he converted to Islam. Muḥammad summoned Waḥshī, and spared his life on account of his faith, but ordered him never to show his face again. Ibn Hishām vol.3 p73 (p.376 in translation).

Abū Dushman! Quench my thirst for vengeance, and quench your own!"²⁹³. As a reward she gave him the ornaments made from the mutilated body parts of the dead Muslims.

After her conversion to Islam at the conquest of Mecca, Hind appears on one further occasion in battle, at Yarmuk in Rajab 636CE/14 AH, shouting "Cut the arms of the uncircumcised with your swords!"²⁹⁴. So it would seem that Hind fought as actively for her adopted religion as she did in defence of her original traditions.

There are relatively few examples of Muslim women actively fighting, and it appears that in most of their cases it was somewhat accidental. Umm 'Umāra, whose real name was Nusayba bint Ka'b bint 'Amr of the Banū an-Najjār²⁹⁵ fought at Uḥud, in the course of the battle she was severely wounded as the following account of her from Ibn Sa'd demonstrates:

Darma b. Sa'd al-Maznī said his grandmother had been at Uḥud giving water and she said, 'I heard the messenger of Allah say the stand of Nusayba bint Ka'b today was better than the position of so and so. On that day he saw her fighting strongly and she fought until she was wounded 13 times and she said that she saw Ibn Qumay'a strike her on her neck and it was treated for a year, then the herald of the Messenger of Allah called [for them to go to] Ḥawa al-Asād and she tried but could not move because of loss of blood. We put compresses on the wound from the night to the morning. When the Messenger of Allah returned from Ḥawa he did not receive [anyone] at his house until he had sent 'Abd Allah bin Ka'b to ask about her and he returned to him with the news of her safety. The Prophet was happy because of this'²⁹⁶.

²⁹³ Al-Ṭabarī *Ta'rikh* I p1387 (vol. 7 p107, translation by Watt and McDonald). Abū Dushman was Waḥshī's kunya.

²⁹⁴ Al-Balādhūrī *Futūḥ* p135.

²⁹⁵ Nusayba bint Ka'b was one of the two women alleged to have been present at the Second Pledge of 'Aqaba. The other was Asmā' bint 'Amr of the Banū Salama. Ibn Hishām vol.2 p466-7 (p212 in translation).

²⁹⁶ Ibn Sa'd vol.8 p413. Nusayba was the daughter of ar-Raḥāb bint 'Abd Allah b. Ḥabīb. She married twice, firstly Zayd b. 'Aṣim to whom she bore two sons, 'Abd Allah and Ḥabīb. She then married Ghaziya b. 'Amr and bore him Tamīm and Khawla. The two men she married were patrilineal cousins of each other. The account of Nusayba is found only in the Ibn Hishām notes to the *sīra* of Ibn Ishāq (p755 in translation, referred to on vol.3 p380).

In the same account she also describes the events in her own words, and she claims that she was indeed at Uḥud carrying water-skins but when she saw the people being overpowered she joined in to protect Muḥammad with a sword and a bow and arrow until she entered into battle with Ibn Qumay'a . From her account it sounds as if Ibn Qumay'a did not strike her accidentally, though she was with a group of people at the time it appears that blows were exchanged. She said,:

Ibn Qumay'a advanced when the people left Muḥammad and he was shouting "Show me Muḥammad - I will not be saved if he is saved" . Mus'ab b. 'Umayr confronted him with some people and I was with them and he hit me and I hit him with these blows, but the enemy of Allah had double armour on him²⁹⁷ .

So it seems that Umm 'Umāra's initial military activity was rather accidental, in that she happened to be at Uḥud in a regular activity of carrying water and joined in the fight to help defend Muḥammad himself. However, it seems that her career did not end with Uḥud, as she appears again at the battle of Yamāmah. Muḥammad had sent her son Ḥabīb b. Zayd along with 'Abd Allah b. Wahb al- Aṣlamī to Musaylimah, the self-styled prophet leader of the Yamāmah. For some reason, Musaylimah cut off Ḥabīb's hands and feet whilst leaving 'Abd Allah unharmed, but it was this act against her son which saw Umm 'Umāra in combat once again against Musaylimah where she was again wounded²⁹⁸. After this foray it appears that she retired from active combat.

Umm Sulaym, previously mentioned as having achieved nobility for her acts as a water bearer for the Muslims also would have taken an active role in the

²⁹⁷ Ibn Sa'd vol. 8 p413. .

²⁹⁸ Al-Balādhūrī *Futūḥ*, p92/3. Her suffering twelve wounds in battle against Musaylimah was noted also in Ibn Hishām vol.2 p467 (p212 in translation).

fighting. An account of this is given in Ibn Hishām, on which the following account of al-Ṭabarī is based:

The Messenger of Allah turned and saw Umm Sulaym bint Miḥḥān who was with her husband Abu Ṭalḥa . She had wrapped her waist in a garment as she was pregnant with her son ‘Abd Allah b. Abī Ṭalḥa. She had her husband's camel with her and was afraid that it would overpower her, so she drew its head close to her and put her hand in its halter with the nose ring. The messenger of Allah cried “Umm Sulaym?” She replied “Yes, may you be ransomed with my father and with my mother. O Messenger of Allah! Kill those who flee from you and kill those who fight you for they deserve it”. The Messenger of Allah replied “Rather Allah will suffice, O Umm Sulaym”. She had a dagger in her hand. Her husband was amazed and asked her what it was and she replied “A dagger . I took it with me. If a polytheist comes close to me I would have slit open his belly with it!” He said, “O messenger of Allah, do you hear what Umm Sulaym says”²⁹⁹.

The Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim gives an account of Umm Sulaym, which is virtually identical to that above, other than the ending is slightly different in tone;

The Messenger of Allah began to smile. She said “Messenger of Allah kill all those people other than us whom thou hast declared to be free on the day of the conquest of Mecca. They embraced Islam because they were defeated at your hands”. The Messenger of Allah said, “Umm Sulaym Allah is sufficient and He will be kind to us”.

Here it seems that Muḥammad was amused by her actions, whereas above there seems to be an implication that if not Muḥammad then certainly her husband was shocked by her actions.

So while it appears that Umm Sulaym may not have actually fought herself, she was prepared to do so. These events took place after the Battle of Uḥud at which she had acquitted herself so nobly in the role of water-bearer, and seemed to show a greater militancy in her attitude and wished to take a more active role. The fact that she was prevented from doing so, albeit in either an apparently very kindly

²⁹⁹ Al-Ṭabarī *Ta’rīkh*, vol.1 p1663 (vol.9 p13 translation by Poonawala). Ibn Hishām vol.4 p446-7(p570 in translation). The isnād for the al-Ṭabarī account includes ibn Ḥumayd, Salamah and Ibn Ishāq, thus is based on the Ibn Ishāq sīra in the Ibn Hishām recension.

manner by Muḥammad or through the horror of her husband, may show that there were the beginnings of a change in attitude towards women fighting. It cannot be ruled out that the fact that she was preparing to fight whilst pregnant was the source of the consternation, a fact which is not mentioned in Muslim, rather than the actions itself. However, had her pregnancy been an issue, it may be wondered why she was there. This contradicts Esposito's theory mentioned earlier that women were undesirable members of the tribe as they were weakened by pregnancy and slowed things down.

A later example of a Muslim woman taking part in a battle was Umm Ḥākim at the battle of Marj aṣ-Ṣaffār outside Damascus against the 'Greeks' in Muḥarram 636 CE/14 AH. Her story is another example of a woman fighting for revenge over the death of a loved one:

On that day Khālīd b. Sā'īd b. Al-Asī b. Umayyah . . . fell a martyr. In the evening previous to the day of the morning on which the battle was fought, he was married to Umm Ḥākim, the daughter of al-Ḥārith b. Hāshim al-Makhzūmī, and former wife of 'Ikrimah b. Abī Jāhl. Hearing the news of his death, Umm Ḥākim pulled out a pole of the tent and fought with it. On that day, according to some report, she killed seven people and had her face still covered with ointment perfumed with saffron³⁰⁰

An account of Arab women marching as a regiment against a Persian seaport describes a band of women under Azdah bint al-Ḥārith who "turned their veils into flags and marching in martial array to the battlefield and were mistaken for reinforcements and contributed at a crucial moment to victory"³⁰¹.

What the two examples above show is that again, in the case of Muslim women their participation never seems to be planned as a part of the campaign,

³⁰⁰ Al-Balādhūrī, *Futūḥ*, p118.

³⁰¹ Ahmed, p70. No source given.

rather, that they just happened to be there and took part either for their own devices, such as for revenge, or to assist the men in their cause.

While it appears from the above examples that the presence and participation of women in warfare was sanctioned by Muḥammad, it appears from the ḥadīth that after his death there was a backlash against this activity, as demonstrated by this ḥadīth:

It has been narrated on the authority of Yazīd b. Hurmūz that Najda wrote to Ibn ‘Abbās inquiring of him five things. Ibn ‘Abbās said, 'If I had not the fear of committing sin for concealing knowledge I would not have written to him. Najda wrote to him saying (after praising the Almighty and invoking blessings on the Holy Prophet): Tell me whether the Messenger of Allah took women to participate with him in Jihād; (if he did) and whether he allocated them a regular share of the booty . . . Ibn ‘Abbās wrote to him, 'You have written asking me whether the Messenger of Allah took women with him to participate in jihād. He did take them to the battle and sometimes he fought along with them. They would treat the wounded and were given a reward from the booty, but he did not assign them any regular share for them³⁰².

This ḥadīth shows some reluctance from Ibn ‘Abbās to make it widely known that women had been permitted to go to war by Muḥammad. It states that Muḥammad would sometimes fight 'along with them', referring to the women , implying that women on the Muslim side participated in warfare. The issue of booty is also raised. An example of a woman accompanying the Muslim army and requesting a share in the spoils is that of Khuwaylah bint Ḥākīm b. Umayyah al-Sulamiyyah, the wife of ‘Uthmān b. Maz‘un. She was with the army at the siege of al-Ṭā’if in the year 630 CE /8 AH and asked Muḥammad if, should the Muslims win, she could have the jewellery of either Ubadiyah bint Ghaylān b. Salamah or al-Fāriah bint ‘Uqayl as they

³⁰² Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim vol 3 p1002 , DCCL.

were the most bejewelled women of al-Ṭā'if³⁰³. The reason for this reluctance cannot simply have been that there was a movement against women having a share in booty. It was stated that they got something in the event of victory but were not allocated a share in the same way as the men were.

Indeed, there exists a ḥadīth in which it is said women were not permitted to go on jihād at all with Muḥammad. It is written that ʿĀ'isha had asked Muḥammad if she could go on his expeditions with him and he said to her that for women their jihād was Ḥājj³⁰⁴. Although this ḥadīth is said to be on the authority of ʿĀ'isha, there is overwhelming evidence that women were present in battles with Muḥammad and on occasion fought with him. It is also to be noted that ʿĀ'isha's deliberate presence at the battle of the Camel seems to be in stark contrast to the ḥadīth she is alleged to have transmitted.

Leaders.

Women as leaders of military expeditions are not unknown from both Antiquity and the early Islamic period. However, examples of these are few and therefore it is hard to define any patterns in this area. Also, as most of them are from some time in the past there is a great danger of the stories being embellished, making them almost mythological. Abbott compiled an article on the subject of Arab queens, though it seems that they did not always take anything other than a ceremonial role³⁰⁵. It appears that women leaders were mostly in that position as a result of inheriting power from either a parent or spouse. The most famous leader

³⁰³ Ibn Hishām vol.4 p484 (p590 in translation) Al-Ṭabarī *Ta'rikh* I p1673 (vol. 9 p24-5 translation by Poonawala).

³⁰⁴ Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī, vol. iv. Book of Jihād, chapter 62, no. 127/8 p83 on the authority of ʿĀ'isha bint Ṭalḥa - ʿĀ'isha bint Abī Bakr.

³⁰⁵ Abbott, "Pre-Islamic Arab Queens", *AJSL* (1941).

from antiquity is probably the Queen of Sheba, although she does not appear in any tradition to have been a military leader. Her visit to King Solomon appears to have been a diplomatic mission and she did not march with an army but with an entourage of courtiers, though inevitably some must have been armed. However, analysis of the Queen of Sheba, though interesting, is somewhat irrelevant. She more than any other ancient Arab woman has been subject to creative licence and indeed there is no historical proof that she ever even existed from what is believed to be her homeland of Saba'. While the Biblical account may indicate that she did exist, no facts can be known about her with certainty, to the extent that her own name is not definitely known³⁰⁶.

A more historical example of an Arab woman military leader is Queen Zenobia. In some respects she fares as badly as the Queen of Sheba as she too has become the stuff of legends to some extent. She was queen of the city of Palmyra in Syria from c. 367-273 C.E., which at that time was an important military and trading centre forming a focus for the numerous villages and tribes in the area. It was also an outpost of the Roman Empire³⁰⁷. The city produced one of the first Arab senators, Odenathus Septimus. On his death, according to the classical sources, Zenobia took control and rebelled against Rome and the Tanūkh confederacy³⁰⁸. Zenobia was ultimately defeated by the Romans and taken away in chains.

³⁰⁶ For a full account and analysis of the Queen of Sheba, see *The Queen of Sheba*, ed. James. This work contains articles dealing with the various traditions about the Queen from Jewish, Christian, Islamic and Ethiopian perspectives as well as archaeological material about South Arabia. See also, "Pre-Islamic Arab Queens", N. Abbott *AJS* (1941) p1-3, EI² 'Bilkis'.

³⁰⁷ Boucher, *Syria as a Roman Province* p144.

³⁰⁸ The Tanūkh confederacy was a group of tribes which migrated northwards from their original homeland in the al-Qāṭif region of north-east Arabia near the Euphrates. Although the Tanūkh are mentioned in the Arabic sources it was not until inscriptions were found this century naming leaders of the Tanūkh such as Jādhimah and 'Amr b. 'Adī that their historical existence was confirmed (Bowersock, *Roman Arabia* p132-3).

The Arab sources are somewhat different in their portrayal of the queen, and are more legendary in character. The queen of Palmyra here is called al-Zabba', which was the nickname of Nā'ila³⁰⁹, daughter of the previous king of the city on whose murder she assumed power³¹⁰. She built twin fortresses on the banks of the Euphrates, one for herself and the other for her sister Zabība. She attacked the Tanūkh, but was defeated and took her own life sucking on a poisoned ring³¹¹.

It is generally assumed that Zenobia and al-Zabba' were one and the same person³¹², although the way in which they were portrayed in classical and Arabic sources is rather different. As for her role as a military leader, she has a strong role in the classical sources in which she is described as riding her charger with the army in full visibility of the men, although she did issue her orders through her general³¹³. The Arab historians do not give her such a strong role, though she is said to have been at the head of her army when she went out to meet Jādhimah³¹⁴. Her defeat at the hands of the Tanūkh is attributed to soothsaying and supernatural forces³¹⁵,

³⁰⁹ Al-Zabba' means the hairy one in Arabic and this is perhaps interesting as it calls to mind the Queen of Sheba who was known for her hairy legs. Also, the method by which al-Zabba' tricked Jādhimah to his death was pretending that she wanted to marry him, but when he arrived he found that she was not prepared for marriage as the hair of her pudenda was plaited, something which it appears to be suggested from the text would not have been the case had a genuine marriage been about to take place (al-Ṭabarī *Ta'riḫ* I p760 vol.1 p141 translation by Perlmann). According to Boucher, (p144), her name in Palmyrene Aramaic was *br zby* which means daughter of a merchant.

³¹⁰ Her father was 'Amr b. Ṣarīb al-'Amlāqī, the first king to conquer the region. He was killed by Jādhimah, leader of the Tanūkh which was why al-Zabba' went out seeking revenge against the rival king (al-Ṭabarī *Ta'riḫ*, I p756/7, vol.4 p.138 in translation by Perlmann).

³¹¹ Al-Ṭabarī *Ta'riḫ* I p768. (Vol. 4 p148 translation by Perlmann).

³¹² The one scholar who appears to be in disagreement with this is Trimmingham, who proposed a rival thesis in *Christianity among the Pre-Islamic Arabs*.

³¹³ Wright, *Palmyra and Zenobia* p147.

³¹⁴ Al-Ṭabarī *Ta'riḫ* I .p 760 (vol.4 p142 translation by Perlmann).

³¹⁵ Al-Ṭabarī *Ta'riḫ* I p757-68 (vol.4 p139 -150 translation by Perlmann).

which is quite unlike the account given in the classical accounts of her defeat where treachery plays a larger part³¹⁶.

It may be possible to reconcile the two conflicting traditions about Zenobia / al-Zabba'. It seems unlikely that there were two queens of Palmyra from around the same period with similar names and whose life stories do have some degree of overlap. The Roman account may be subject to some inaccuracy and misrepresentation, but in essence is probably not untrue. An analysis of the contradictory traditions and legendary nature of the Arabic account requires further study.

Another Arab queen mentioned in inscriptions and classical sources is Mavia, the Queen of the Saracens. She is said to be later than Zenobia, living during the reign of Valens (364-378 CE). It is said that she broke down the defences of the eastern frontier of the Roman empire and plundered its cities. The details of these raids were disputed, and Mavia's power base has been said to have been in a variety of locations from Chalcis to Hauran in Syria to Pharan in Sinai. It is also said that she became a Christian, although again sources are not in agreement over when this took place, before or after her raids on Rome. Shahīd has her as a representative of the Tanūkhid confederation and the raids were a political dispute prompted by Imperial policy which was finally resolved by an Arab hermit called Moses being appointed Bishop of Alexandria and the marriage³¹⁷ of her daughter to a Roman officer called Victor. It appears that she was a leader of a Roman allied group who broke their alliance and had to renegotiate their agreements. In 378 Mavia was in

³¹⁶ Boucher p144.

³¹⁷ D.F. Graf p349. Graf's sources are Shahīd *Rome and Byzantium in the 4th century*, Bowersock, "Mavia Queen of the Saracens" in *Studien zur antiken Sozialgeschichte* 1980.

Constantinople defending the empire from the Goths only three years after their raids on the Roman East, a transformation which Graf finds incredible.

There do not appear to be any further examples of women in leadership roles until the start of the Islamic period. One of the best known, and, it may be suggested, most highly regarded women leaders from the non-Muslims in this period was Umm Qirfa. She is mentioned in many of the usual sources, the most detailed accounts appear in al-Ṭabarī, where she is mentioned twice, once in great detail and once in less detail again when the story of her daughter is told, also a full account of her fate is found in al-Wāqidī³¹⁸ and Ibn Hishām³¹⁹. She is also briefly mentioned by Yāqūt, but in no great detail and there it was in relation to her daughter. Her mention in al-Wāqidī is expected as she was one of the leaders against Muḥammad and therefore would be included, which may explain also why her daughter was not mentioned as her rebellion was after Muḥammad was dead³²⁰. That al-Ṭabarī tells her story once in its own right and in some detail and then repeats the most important parts again when noting the activities of her daughter may demonstrate that she was a woman of some importance.

Umm Qirfa's real name was Fāṭimah bint Rabī'a b. Fūlān b. Badr and she was married to Mālik b. Hudhaifah b. Badr leader of the Fazāra with whom she had 12 sons, one of whom Hakamah, was killed by Abū Qatādah during a raid on the livestock of Medina³²¹. It seems that on the death of her husband, Umm Qirfa assumed leadership of the tribe and it was she who led the tribe against the Muslim army, who were on this occasion under Zayd b. Ḥāritha. Unfortunately for the

³¹⁸ Al-Wāqidī vol.2 p564.

³¹⁹ Ibn Hishām vol. 4 p617-8 (p664-5 in translation).

³²⁰ This is also presumably, why it is not mentioned in Ibn Hishām as it too ends with the death of Muḥammad.

³²¹ Al-Ṭabarī *Ta'rikh* I p 1558 (vol. 8 p77 translation by Fishbein).

Fazāra, Zayd bore a grudge against them as he had been wounded at an earlier exchange at Wādī al-Qurā, when, according to al-Wāqidī, he had been on a trade mission on behalf of Muḥammad and had come upon some of the Fazāra who had killed many of his men³²². According to Ibn Hishām the second encounter between the Fazāra and the Muslims also happened at the Wādī al-Qurā³²³ and he had taken an oath after that day that no impurity would touch him until he had raided the Fazāra³²⁴. After he had recovered from his injuries Muḥammad allowed him to go on an expedition against the Fazāra³²⁵. When the day went against the Fazāra he was determined to extract revenge on the leaders. He ordered Qays b. al-Musahham al-Ya'mūrī to kill Umm Qirfa by tying her legs with a rope to two camels which were then driven apart pulling the old woman's body in two³²⁶. This method of killing the woman appears to have been particularly unpleasant. Al-Wāqidī described this as a violent death and al-Ṭabarī observes that it was a cruel death, and both note that she was a very old woman, which, if it is possible to read an opinion into the texts, appears to show that they was not impressed by this method of execution for not only a woman of high position, but as she was very old and therefore it seemed rather harsh and unnecessary³²⁷. It certainly seems as if the Muslim force wanted

³²² Al-Wāqidī, vol. 2 p564.

³²³ Ibn Hishām vol. 4 p617-8 (p664 in translation). It may be that Ibn Hishām was confused on the point of where the different exchanges took place, although it may be the case that both did occur in the same place. Al-Wāqidī states that Zayd and the Muslims came upon the Fazārah in the Wādī, so perhaps the Wādī was their tribal land. The site of the second encounter is not named in any other source.

³²⁴ Ibn Hishām vol. 4 p617 (p665 in translation). Al-Ṭabarī *Ta'rikh* I p1558 (vol.8 p96 translation by Fishbein). The isnād al-Ṭabarī account is Ibn Ḥumayd - Salama -Ibn Isḥaq, and is thus based on the sīra.

³²⁵ Al-Ṭabarī *Ta'rikh* I p1557, (vol. 8 p96 translation by Fishbein), Ibn Hishām vol.4 p617 (p665 in translation).

³²⁶ Al-Ṭabarī *Ta'rikh* I p1558 (vol. 8 p96 translation by Fishbein).

³²⁷ Al-Ṭabarī *Ta'rikh* I p1558 (vol. 8 p96 translation by Fishbein) , al-Wāqidī vol. 2 p564. Ibn Hishām vol.4 p617 (p665 in translation).

her absolutely dead and considered killing her in a normal way was insufficient. Also, though Zayd b. Ḥarītha was the man intent on revenge her ordered someone else to kill her. Why he did this is not stated, and it does seem odd that the man who specially wanted to have his revenge on the tribe did not want to carry out the execution himself. The reason for this may not have been that he was afraid of the tribe taking out revenge on him personally as by this point the Fazāra had been subdued, at least until Salma led them in rebellion some years later. It seems that for some reason, he did not want to be involved in killing this woman, which, along with the method of her death, may indicate that Umm Qirfa was a person with whom the Muslims were unsure of how to deal.

This may have been in part because it appears that Umm Qirfa was held in high esteem by her people, leading to the saying "had you been more powerful than Umm Qirfa you could have done no more"³²⁸. This value that they placed on her and her position in the tribe was such that reprisals may have been feared for her killing. If this had been the case, then it would appear to have been more logical to keep her prisoner and taken her away as booty as they did with her daughter.

After the defeat of the Fazāra at the hands of the Muslims, Umm Qirfa's daughter, Salma Umm Ziml bint Mālik b. Hudhayfa b. Badr al -Fazārya³²⁹, was captured. According to Ibn Hishām she was captured by Salama b. 'Amr b. al- Akwa and was brought to Muḥammad. She was given as a wife to Ḥazm b. Abī Wahb to whom she bore a son, 'Abd al-Raḥmān³³⁰. Yāqūt states that she was captured but the captor is unnamed, although she was given by him to 'Ā'isha who set her free and as

³²⁸ Ibn Hishām, vol.4 p618 (p665 in translation), Al-Ṭabarī *Ta'rikh* I p1558 (vol. 8 p96 translation by Fishbein).

³²⁹ This is the full name for her recorded in Yāqūt vol. 2 p253.

³³⁰ Ibn Hishām vol.4 p618 (p664 in translation), also Al-Ṭabarī *Ta'rikh* I p1558/9 (vol. 8 p96 translation by Fishbein).

a result Salma stayed with her before eventually returning to her tribe³³¹. Al-Ṭabarī does not name her captor when dealing with her story specifically, but in the passage dealing with the death of Umm Qirfa he indicates who it may have been, but it is not entirely clear. First he says that one of Umm Qirfa's daughters was captured by Qays, but the daughter is unnamed, and then later he states that the daughter of Umm Qirfa belonged to Salamah b. 'Amr b. Al-Akwa' "who had taken her". He then goes on to state that this daughter was asked for by Muḥammad and when he was given to him he passed her on to his maternal uncle Ḥazm b. Abī Wahb and she bore him 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Ḥazm.³³² This latter idea that it was Salamah who captured her would appear to agree with the general consensus on this matter in the other sources. No mention is made of any other daughter of Umm Qirfa, though it is possible that there was another daughter whose fate was not noted. However, given that the sons and one known daughter of Umm Qirfa were recorded it may suggested that it would be unusual not to name another daughter if there was one. It may be argued that daughters are not always considered important enough to be included by name unless they had done something worth writing about, and therefore would be excluded even though uninteresting sons would be included in a list of offspring. It may be said in response to that that it appears in the texts which give genealogies, that the women are included and their exact place in the tribe is known. Therefore they must have been counted and their names and backgrounds remembered, as it is a fact well established that at this stage the nobility of a person and their relationship to their own people and their allies was often as dependant on the mother as on the father. It appears that there was some confusion as to who

³³¹ Yāqūt vol. 2 p253 and al-Ṭabarī *Ta'riḫ* I p1559 (vol.8 p 77 translation by Fishbein) .

³³² Al-Ṭabarī *Ta'riḫ* I p1557/8 (vol. 8 p 96/97 translation by Fishbein).

initially captured Salma, perhaps Qays captured her but gave her to Salamah for some reason which was never recorded. It seems perhaps unlikely that a daughter of such a noble and renowned woman would not be recorded. To support the idea that Umm Qirfa only had one daughter, al-Ṭabarī appears to indicate that himself in his second version of the story of the expedition which went as follows:

The Messenger of God appointed Abū Bakr³³³ as our commander, and we raided some of the Banū Fazāra. When we came near the watering place, Abū Bakr ordered us to halt for a rest. After we prayed the dawn prayer, Abū Bakr ordered us to launch the raid against them. We went down to the watering place and there we killed some people. I saw a group of people, women and children among them, who had almost outstripped us to the mountain; so I sent an arrow between them and the mountain. When they saw the arrow they stopped, and I led them back to Abū Bakr. Among them was a woman of the Banū Fazāra wearing a worn out piece of leather. With her was her daughter, among the fairest of the Arabs. Abū Bakr gave me the daughter as booty, When I returned to Medina the messenger of God met me in the market and said, 'Salamah, how excellent a father begot you!- give me the woman'. I said 'Messenger of God I like her, by God, and I have not uncovered her garment'. He said nothing to me until the next day, when he met me in the market and said, 'Salamah, - how excellent a father begot you!- give me the woman'. I said, 'Messenger of God I have not uncovered her garment. She is yours, Messenger of God.' The messenger of God sent her to Mecca and with her he ransomed some Muslim captives who were in the hands of the polytheists³³⁴.

This account of the capture of Salma is quite different to the others. Firstly, the raiding party is here under the leadership of Abū Bakr, whereas in all other accounts it is implied that the party was under Zayd b. Ḥāritha, indeed al-Ṭabarī states in the earlier account of the story that Zayd was sent with an army against the Fazāra, with no mention of it being under anyone else's leadership .

³³³ Abū Bakr b. Abī Quhafah.

³³⁴ Al-Ṭabarī *Ta'rikh* I p1558/9 (vol. 8 p97 translation by Fishbein) The version given here is Fishbein's translation of the passage.

The attack on the Fazāra appears have been a surprise attack, in a definite raiding style, especially as it was carried out first thing in the morning which appears to always have been the preferred time for an attack. They caught some of them off guard at a watering hole, which might lead one to assume that it was an undefended party which may have consisted of women and children, and the passage states that they attacked only some of the Fazāra which might imply that the main body of the tribe was elsewhere and that this was indeed a relatively undefended party which was perhaps partially why the Muslims were able to raid it so successfully.

One of the most interesting parts of the various accounts of Salma bint Mālik from a source critical perspective is the tradition dealing with the dogs of al-Ḥaw'ab. All the traditions agree that Muḥammad said either in front of Salma and 'Ā'isha or in front of his wives, that one of them would make the dogs of al-Ḥaw'ab bark. From al-Ṭabarī there are three separate accounts of this story, once when discussing Salma as a captive and then being freed and continuing to live with 'Ā'isha. It is said that when she was still with 'Ā'isha Muḥammad had said that one of the two women would cause the dogs of al-Ḥaw'ab to bark, which Salma did with her apostasy³³⁵. This anecdote seems quite unlikely to be true and appears to be a device to set 'Ā'isha as a good woman and Salma as a bad one, and that her apostasy was given as the cause of their barking.

His second version of the story is given in a context rather different to that above. In this version Salma is not even mentioned. In the year 36AH, 'Ā'isha was involving herself in the politics of the Muslim community and was about to participate in the rebellion of Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr against 'Alī, with the superficial

³³⁵ Al-Ṭabarī *Ta'rikh* I p. 1558/9 (vol. 8 p78 translation by Fishbein).

cause of avenging the death of the third of the Rashīdūn Caliphs, ‘Uthmān. The party were on their way to Basra where they had just purchased a camel for ‘Ā’isha, and they stopped at a watering hole. Whilst they were stopped there one night she heard the dogs barking at them. She asked where they were and when she was told they were at al-Ḥaw’ab she shrieked at the top of her voice and hit the upper foreleg of her camel to make it kneel, saying "By Allah, I am the one who made the dogs of al-Ḥaw’ab bark". She then asked three times to be taken back to the Hejaz, and she refused to move for twenty four hours. Eventually the party moved on when Ibn Al-Zubayr came to warn them that ‘Alī was on his way³³⁶.

The third mention of the dogs of al-Ḥaw’ab in al-Ṭabarī again mentions only ‘Ā’isha. When Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr heard that ‘Alī was camped at Dhu Qār they headed for Basra and took the road to al-Munkadir. They heard dogs barking by a watering hole at which they had halted. ‘Ā’isha asked where they were and when she was told they were at al-Ḥaw’ab she exclaimed " We belong to Allah and to him we return! . . . I am she! I heard the Messenger of God say in the presence of his wives 'I wish I knew at which one of you the dogs of al-Ḥaw’ab will bark'". She wanted to turn back but in this version, she was persuaded to continue because ‘Abd Allah b. al-Zubayr told her that whoever had said that they were at al-Ḥaw’ab was lying³³⁷. Yāqūt also mentions the barking of the dogs of al-Ḥaw’ab, in two different contexts, firstly that it was ‘Ā’isha who heard the barking when on her journey from Basra and

³³⁶ Al-Ṭabarī *Ta’rīkh* I. p 3110 (vol. 16 p50 in translation- Brockett). On the authority of al-Uranī. Al-Uranī is named as the owner of the camel, and the camel of which he was the owner was that which was to be ridden by ‘Ā’isha. He was present at these events to give his version of them because as well as requiring his camel he was also engaged by an unnamed rider of the party as a guide.

³³⁷ Al-Ṭabarī *Ta’rīkh* I p3127 (vol. 16 p68 translation by Brockett) on the authority of al-Zuhri.

asked what place they were at and was told they were by al-Ḥaw'ab. The anecdote of the barking dogs and Muḥammad is also given though apostasy was not given as the reason for the barking³³⁸.

The three al-Ṭabarī accounts are the most interesting. They show three different versions of the story, though only one mentions Salma, so it may be that she was not involved. Certainly it seems that perhaps the dogs could not have been made to bark by her as the rebellion which she was to lead against Muḥammad was before the rebellion of Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr which appears to be the stated time for this incident taking place.

That an alternative tradition exists about who made the dogs bark is interesting. It seems that this may have been an attempt to deflect attention away from 'Ā'isha being the one at whom the dogs were to bark. It seems from the traditions that Muḥammad suspected one of his wives of treachery. The way in which he addressed his wives, "I wish I knew at which one of you the dogs of al-Ḥaw'ab will bark" in the way in which he did may indicate this, as it seems that he was aware that one of them was if not then in the future to plot something of which he would not approve, and this statement appears to be the Prophet rather wistfully wondering which one of his wives would turn out to be the treacherous one. The barking of the dogs at a person may be seem to be an omen that that person was in the wrong in some way. The al-Ṭabarī tradition that Muḥammad addressed this comment to his wives might well also cast doubt on his other tradition of Salma having been present as she was never one of his wives, but was married to his uncle Ḥazm. Unless she was present at this address in her capacity as a companion to

³³⁸ Yāqūt vol. 2 p253.

‘Ā’isha there is no other obvious means by which she could have been addressed by this statement.

What else may be viewed as significant here is that the tradition of the dogs barking at a woman has been transferred to another woman leader in rebellion against that person regarded as the rightful successor to Muḥammad. So it seems as if ‘Ā’isha may have been the one to make the dogs bark, but some traditionists have transferred the blame onto a character who acted in a similar way to ‘Ā’isha, namely Salma bint Mālik.

As noted above, after the death of Muḥammad Salma seized the opportunity to rebel. When her position was between Thafar and al-Ḥaw’ab she gathered allies from the Ghaṭafān, Ḥawāzin, Salīm, Asad and Tay’. She then led the forces of the Fazāra and her allies against the Muslims mounted on a camel³³⁹. She led the forces while standing upon what is alleged to have been her mother’s camel, and stirred up the troops to fight Khālīd b. al-Walīd³⁴⁰. The fighting was most fierce around her camel, no doubt in part because Khālīd b. al-Walīd had offered a hundred camels to the man who could disable her mount. Eventually she was brought down and killed, but not until many, according to Yāqūt, a hundred men, had died in her defence. Al-Ṭabarī and Yāqūt note that the camel was the same camel as that which her mother had used in her fight against the army of Zayd³⁴¹. This is of course unlikely, though it seems to imply that she was viewed as filling the same role as her mother, as she was as renowned as she had been and she was said to have fought as bravely as her mother.

³³⁹ Yāqūt vol. 2 p253.

³⁴⁰ Al-Ṭabarī *Ta’rīkh* I p1901/2 (vol.10 p77 translation by Donner).

³⁴¹ Al-Ṭabarī *Ta’rīkh* I p. 1901(vol. 10 p77 translation by Donner), al-Yāqūt vol. 2 p253.

The possible significance of her being on a camel will be discussed later, but it would appear in any case that she was seen to be a heroine to her own tribe and they appear to have followed her to their deaths willingly. Although it may have been that they were ready and happy to attempt to rebel against the Muslims as were many others at that time, it seems that she was perhaps the natural choice as their leader.

Returning briefly to the matter of the traditions which appear to concern both her and 'Ā'isha, that is, the dogs of al-Ḥaw'ab, the behaviour of the two women does appear to contain similar imagery. The two of them led rebellions against the rightful successor to Muḥammad, and both were present at the battles on camels. The parallel imagery may indicate that there has been some fusing of the two stories over time, although this does not imply that either event was fabricated. It does not appear to be untrue that Salma led her tribe against Abū Bakr's army, and the battle of the camel is a real event. However, it is interesting that here there are two women of nobility amongst their own people leading similar rebellions and in similar styles.

Women as leaders do not appear to have ever been as numerous as men at any stage in Arab history as far as can be deduced from the evidence available. However, it does appear that women in the early community continued to exercise some authority over the affairs of the community, 'Ā'isha in particular being politically active until the Battle of the Camel³⁴². The Battle of the Camel is the best example of a woman going into battle in a litter from the early Islamic period. 'Alī b.

³⁴² For a further discussion of the battle and 'Ā'isha's involvement, see chapter six. Also, for other discussions of 'Ā'isha's political activism and Muslim responses to it, see "'Ā'isha; Public Position and political example" - D. Spellberg, in *Women in Middle Eastern History* ed. Baron and Keddie (1991) "Nizām al-Mulk's Manipulation of tradition 'Ā'isha and the Role of Women in the Islamic Government", D. Spellberg, *The Muslim World* vol. 78 (1988), "The Mother of the Believers in the Ḥadīth", B. Stowasser.

Abī Ṭālib became the fourth and last Rashidūn caliph in 656 CE / 35 AH. He succeeded ʿUthmān, who was assassinated, and he himself was also to be assassinated by a Kharijite after ruling for only a year. ʿAlī was not elected caliph by a shūra, or council, as had been originally been appointed by ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb on his deathbed to deal with matters of succession. Two former members of the shūra, Ṭalḥa b. ʿUbaydallah al-Ṭaymī and Zubayr b. al-ʿAwwam al-Asadī, felt that they had a strong claim to the caliphate, indeed, just as strong as ʿAlī. They lead the anti-ʿAlid movement, and they got the backing of ʿĀʾisha in their rebellion against ʿAlī³⁴³. The culmination of the anti-ʿAlid sentiment came in 656 CE /36AH at the Battle of the Camel.

At the Battle, ʿĀʾisha's camel was the focus of much of the fighting. Al-Ṭabarī claims that all seventy men who had held the nose-reign of her camel were killed on that day. ʿĀʾisha was seated throughout the battle in her litter, which in the text is called a howdah, and when the forces of ʿAlī began to shoot at her, she called out "My sons! [Remember] the recompense [of Allah]! The recompense!"³⁴⁴ and when they continued to advance she cried out "You men! Curse the killers of 'Uthman and their various supporters!"³⁴⁵ She began to imprecate them. When finally her camel was hamstrung she was carried away by her brother Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr who erected a tent over her. ʿAlī went in to her and she conceded that he had won and requested an honourable pardon. ʿAlī set her free and sent her away with 12000

³⁴³ The three leaders, Ṭalḥa, Zubayr and ʿĀʾisha represented the Qurayshi 'old guard', who feared that the state would become dominated by the supporters of ʿAlī, especially the Kufans who were predominantly south Arabian and tribal. They thought that they would prove uncontrollable and anarchic (Brockett's introduction to his own translation of Al-Ṭabarī *Ta'rikh*, vol.16).

³⁴⁴ Al-Ṭabarī *Ta'rikh* I p3191 (vol. 16 p132 translation by Brockett).

³⁴⁵ Al-Ṭabarī *Ta'rikh* I p3191 (vol.16 p132 translation by Brockett).

dirhams and a group of forty Baṣran women³⁴⁶. That she was sent away with a group containing women suggests that there were other women also present who are not named anywhere in the text.

Women also appear to have been able to sit in positions of power in Muslim history, such as Shajarat al-Durr³⁴⁷ or Khayzuran³⁴⁸ although it seems from Mernissi's overview of women rulers in Islam the majority appear to have been non-Arabs or if they were Arabs then they were Shiites³⁴⁹. It certainly seems that women who did attain political power may have been very individual, that is, in the same way as it may be contested that Hatshepsut of ancient Egypt was by no means 'normal' then the Islamic queens were not either. The instances of women ruling, or having any power in their own right which was not gained by being married to a caliph and being able to manipulate him or by being mothers are sufficiently few to say that women effectively did not function openly as leaders much after the end of the Rashidun Caliphate.

³⁴⁶ Al-Ṭabarī *Ta'rikh* I p3231 (vol.16 p170, translation by Brockett). Al-Baladhūri, *Ansāb al-Ashraf*, vol.II p250, though here the guard was mixed men and women. Al-Mufīd, *Muṣnafāt al-Shaykh al-Mufīd*, p415. This account is quite different, as he describes a group of forty women dressed as men and carrying swords.

³⁴⁷ Shajarat Al-Durr was briefly the ruler of Egypt coming to power in 1250 CE / 648 AH. Although her period as leader was brief, she brought the Muslims a victory against the Crusaders. An interesting point about her given the subject of chapter six of this dissertation is that she occupied the first maḥmal, a type of ceremonial litter taken on the pilgrimage to Mecca from Cairo (Morgenstern, p43).

³⁴⁸ Khayzuran was born in the Jurash region of Yemen.

³⁴⁹ Mernissi, *Forgotten Queens of Islam*. The majority of her examples deal with non-Arabs, e.g. Dokuz Khatan, the favourite wife of Hulagu, grandson of Genghis Khan. Mernissi claims that she was important in the formation of the attitude of the conquering Mongols towards Christians (p21), Padishah Khatun, who married one of her former husband's sons in contravention of Islamic law (p101), Radiyya, who took power in Delhi in 1236 CE / 634 AH and ruled as an absolute monarch for four years. She rode a horse, armed with bow and arrow in military campaigns and walked among the people like a man with face uncovered and hair cropped (p96). or Shi'ites such as the two Yemenite queens, 'Asma and 'Arwa who ruled in the eleventh and twelfth centuries respectively (p116-152).

³⁴⁹ Among the Bedouin of course the situation was much different from that generally. As stated earlier, the way of life of the tribes dictates that if an encampment is attacked then women will inevitably be present on occasion and have to be involved in some way.

Conclusion of Chapter Three.

It has been demonstrated above that women had a very important part in warfare, particularly in the support and encouragement of the men. They were responsible for performing various tasks, but it seems that for most women, most of the time, their primary function was to support and encourage the men. By so doing, they not only tried to ensure their own protection from capture, but also helped to defend tribal honour by spurring the men on to victory.

There are few examples of women in more prominent roles of fighting themselves or as commanders of armies. Obviously, if women were not supposed to be harmed during warfare, then to put them in the situation of actual combatants would be contradictory. Thus it seems that women may have known how to defend themselves, but were not on the whole encouraged to fight.

Their participation showed them to be fully active members of the tribe, contributing to the success of their group in war in the ways which were open to them and appropriate. That they continued to be involved into the Muslim period shows again, that Islam did not dispense with all cultural and social features of non-Muslim life. The retention of this particular activity may demonstrate that the position of women as in war as a social contribution was not seen to be in contradiction with anything Islamic. However, as seen from the above ḥadīth from Ibn ʿAbbās, this attitude was changing, and gradually women ceased to be taken on campaigns even in the most passive of roles.

What appears to have taken place is, that among the armies of the increasingly urbanised Muslim world, women were no longer taken to support the men, though among the Bedouin tribes women were then, and still were into this

century, involved in warfare. Why this dichotomy between the women of the settled Muslim community and the nomadic community developed may be attributed to three factors. Firstly, the increasing occultation of women in the Muslim world may have meant that going on campaigns with their men was gradually phased out, whereas the nomad women did not experience this change in their social place and thus continued to behave in the same way as they had done throughout tribal memory. Secondly, women may not have been required to accompany the men of the larger Muslim armies to perform their traditional tasks of water-carrying or tending the wounded as there were sufficient men to do this. Again, among the nomadic groups, the demographic situation was largely unchanged, and thus women were still very much needed to continue performing their traditional tasks. Thirdly, the women were taken to remind the men of their honour. This protection of honour meant that they needed to be brave and protect their women, with the implied threat that failure to do so would mean that they would lose their wives affections. In the Muslim society, the motivation to fight bravely was the twofold interests of Islam and booty. The glorification of Islam was not something which was intimately related to the women, and while bravery was no doubt important to the Muslims, many would have fought out of religious fervour rather than threat of castigation by their women. Among the nomads, wars do not appear to have been fought between the tribes on matters of Islam, but still were based on the same reason as they had always been, namely honour. Thus it seems that again, the position of women here was relatively unchanged, and as here the men and women lived in close proximity with one another the attitudes of the women towards the men were still of relevance.

In conclusion, the participation of women in warfare from a social perspective changed relatively little over this period whether among Muslims or non-Muslims. Any changes which were to occur took place some years in the future.

Chapter Four.

The Religious Environment of Arabia before Islam.

This chapter is intended as a background for the subsequent discussion of specific features of Arabian religious life before Islam became the dominant force. Therefore consideration will be given to the Semitic background of the belief system of the Arabs. This overview will look at communities in Arabia at that time, but an analysis of the degree of deviation from a common ancestry in all areas of ritual observance is not discussed in depth. In addition to this, attention will be given to the ritual specialists operating in Arabia amongst the polytheistic communities, and especially the women who functioned in these roles.

The Religious Communities in Arabia.

The prevailing theory of the origins of Islam in western scholarship is essentially that proposed by W.Montgomery-Watt³⁵⁰. He believed that Islam could only have come out of an environment in which there was a religious and spiritual vacuum which needed to be filled. His theory will not be examined in detail here, other than to propose that whatever the shortcomings of polytheism from a Judeo-Christian perspective, there was a religious life in Arabia at this time which existed in contradiction with his analysis of the situation³⁵¹. With regard to Watt's belief in a spiritual vacuum a few observations may be made. It seems that for the majority of

³⁵⁰ In spite of recent criticism (see below, regarding Crone's work), Watt delivered a paper in 1989 (published in *Studies in the History of Arabia* vol. III) in which he had not progressed from his original theories proposed.

³⁵¹ Patricia Crone, in *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* reassessed his theories in the light of her own research and found several difficulties with them which she described in detail. Crone's argument is on the whole very persuasive and highlights the inconsistencies in Watt's work.

Arabs at this time, religion was an immediate and simple matter. There seemed to be no need for any deeply evolved belief system, as the religious practices which the people did observe were those which were suited to their view of the world and how to make it function for them. There was no theology of the afterlife for example, so the practices were not in an attempt to avoid eternal damnation or reward. The attitude was one of maintaining everyday life. This may have meant taking prophylactic measures against jinn, or consulting oracles about issues they faced. It may be noted that the inhabitants of Mecca were said to keep guardian idols in their homes which they would rub on leaving and returning³⁵², as al-Azraqī observed, 'there isn't a man in Mecca without an idol in his house'³⁵³. Their practices, while of immediate concern as opposed to the concern with the life hereafter, were nonetheless seriously done and religion had repercussions for their lives³⁵⁴.

It is generally assumed that the early Arabs were part of the broader Semitic tradition. This seems to be an accurate assessment based on current knowledge.³⁵⁵ They were for the most part polytheistic. Polytheists worshipped a plethora of deities some of which seem to have been more or less tribal gods and others who had a greater following. Divinity could lie in a number of objects and physical features. It appears that the most common were stones, trees and heavenly bodies,

³⁵² Ibn Hishām vol.1 p83 (p38 in translation).

³⁵³ Al- Azraqī, vol.I p78 citing Ibn Ishāq, Ibn Hishām vol.1 p83 (p38 in translation).

³⁵⁴ Burton, *An Introduction to the Hadith* p2 .

³⁵⁵ What the indigenous religious beliefs and practices of the early Semites were is unlikely to ever be known with absolute certainty. Some study has been made of the beliefs of the Bedouin in particular as distinct from their urban contemporaries, such as J. Heninnger "La Religion Bedouinne Préislamique" *Studi Semitici* (1959). Although rather old, the main works still consulted on early Arabian religion include Wellhausen, *Reste Arabische Heidentums*, (1927) and Robertson-Smith *Religion of the Semites*. Slightly more recent works are *Les Religions des Arabes Préislamiques* by the Belgian scholar G. Ryckmans, (Louvain, 1951) and Jāwād 'Alī has produced the encyclopaedia *Ta'rikh al-'Arab qabl al-Islām* . In addition to this there have been some papers published and references in other works not specifically dealing with the topic of Arab religious life before the arrival of Islam.

and evidence of these in pagan Arabian religion is great³⁵⁶. They have enormous religious, folkloric and cultural resonance even unto the present day in the Middle East. While the ancient Arabs can be said perhaps to have been idolatrous, they did not usually worship anthropomorphic images.

Stones are perhaps one of the oldest symbols of the deity which existed in the early Semitic world³⁵⁷. Stones were often used as a place of residence for the deity, though it seems that they did not have to actually symbolise the god itself, but it was the physical dwelling place of the essence of the divine.

It may be that the anthropomorphic images which replaced the rougher more basic images favoured initially were due to influences from cultures with a higher degree of artistic and cultural development, and many of the statues discovered in the northern Arab lands display Hellenistic features³⁵⁸.

In the Arabian peninsula, with the exception of South Arabia, it appears that until a relatively advanced date the majority of idols were worshipped in the form of shapeless blocks of stone³⁵⁹. The stones used may have been exceptional in some way, for example the black stone of the Ka'ba, which may have been a meteor³⁶⁰.

³⁵⁶ Specific 'icons' of belief will for the Arabs be discussed in detail in this and the following chapter.

³⁵⁷ *Stone and Pillar Cult Among the Western Semites*, C.W.McMurray (1986), *Semitic and Hamitic Origins*, Barton(1934), *Religion of the Semites*, Robertson-Smith p 184 -189, ERE sv. Trees, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, Eliade, chapter six.

³⁵⁸ In earlier periods to this there was artistic input from both Mesopotamia in the east and Egypt in the west. Statues from, for example, Ugarit, may display a strong Egyptian influence due to the conquests of the Levant by the Egyptians around this time, for example the depictions of the goddess Anat in a Hathor style head-dress (see Day, "Anat, Mistress of the Animals" *JNES* 51, (1992).

³⁵⁹ It is not always immediately obvious from the descriptions of idols and shrines from the Islamic historians whether the idol is a stone block or a living object. The two terms used for idol seem to be used interchangeably even though each is alleged to have a distinct meaning (see the discussion of this terminology in Arafat, "Fact and Fiction in Pre-Islamic Idol Worship" *Islamic Quarterly* (1968).

³⁶⁰ EI² sv Ka'ba, Rubin, "The Ka'ba - Aspects of its Ritual Function and Position in Pre-Islamic and Early Islamic Times" *JSAI* 8, (1986).

Idols in a human form appear to have been less common. The most notable of which there is definite record is Hubal, a deity of the Ka'ba in Mecca³⁶¹. The idol was claimed to have been introduced to the city by 'Amr b. Lu'ayy, the person usually blamed for the introduction of idolatry in Islamic texts³⁶². It is said that it was made of strings of cornelian³⁶³ beads made into an image of a human being, but as it had a missing right arm the Quraysh gave it a new one of gold³⁶⁴.

³⁶¹ Ibn al-Kalbī, p28 (p21 in translation), Ibn Hishām vol.1 p152-3(p66 translation). He was associated especially with the *istiqām* or divination arrows, which are well-known from the anecdote regarding the sacrifice of Muḥammad's father (Ibn Hishām vol.1 p151-55, p66-8 in translation). The name Hubal has been one which has defied definition. It does not appear to come from any plausible Arabic root, which may indicate that it does indeed originate from somewhere else in the Near East. The composition of the name appears to be Hu - Bal. In Aramaic this translates as He is god. The obvious retort to this is that bal does exist in Arabic, as an archaic usage, meaning husband (Lane, *b-'l*), as it does in both Biblical and modern Hebrew, but with a middle radical ayin. While this is the case normally, examples of the word Bal, or Bel, minus that consonant have been found in near eastern inscriptions, such as those found in the region of Palmyra (Cooke, *A Textbook of North Semitic Inscriptions* p247). Therefore, it may in fact be possible to pin the place of origin of Hubal down to a very few places in northern Arabia where this middle radical was seen to be absent. There are also examples of the name Hubal occurring in the northern Semitic lands (Cooke, *A Textbook of North Semitic Inscriptions* p269) which further increases the likelihood that he was northern in origin, although Cooke postulates that Bel without a middle ayin is Mesopotamian and not Canaanite in origin, though gives no explanation of why this should be so (*A Textbook of North Semitic Inscriptions* p247).

³⁶² Ibn Hishām vol.1 p76 (p35 in translation).

³⁶³ The cornelian beads of which the idol was constructed, or as seems more likely, was decorated, were regarded as having a magical significance by the Mesopotamians. It appears that the use of cornelian can be traced back to Assyrian medical texts in which were instructions about threading stones onto hairs of the patient to cure rheumatism (Campbell-Thompson, *Semitic Magic, Its Origins and Development* p lxiii. He also notes that in Egypt and Sudan arrowheads of the stone were worn on necklaces).

³⁶⁴ Ibn al-Kalbī p28, p21 in translation. This description sounds rather odd, the statue must have been constructed on some sort of framework in order for it to have had a shape, although the sources do not mention it. It may be that there was an idol underneath the beads which were adornment in the same way as it is said the goddesses Allāt and al-'Uzzā had necklaces and earrings (Ibn Hishām vol. 1 p p36 in translation) There really did have to be some foundation to it for it to have lost an arm, and for there to be something to which a golden replacement could be attached.

Specific points relating to the place of trees, in particular the palm tree will be discussed in greater detail in chapter five. The tree often appears to have been a symbol of life itself and was very often seen to be a sign of divinity³⁶⁵.

The worship of astral deities is something which seems quite certainly to have been an aspect of polytheism in early Arab society³⁶⁶. It is known that many of their deities had their origin in astral cults, and certainly the main deities were often based to some degree on such deities. The origins of astral worship from documentary evidence and artefacts is Mesopotamia. Other Semitic cults in the ancient Near East appear to have adopted their pantheon in some form, and it often appears that even in the monotheistic religions a degree of the astronomical imagery has been adopted even if the polytheistic basis has been removed. In chapter five the astral nature of the goddess al-‘Uzzā will be discussed.

The presence of non-polytheistic groups must also be mentioned. Of great note historically are the Jews who lived in the Hejaz, and of them much more is known than of the Christians³⁶⁷. Of course the fate of the Jewish tribes of Medina is well known as is that of the tribes living around Khaybar, and there were Jews living in Mecca³⁶⁸.

³⁶⁵ ERE sv. Trees, Eliade, patterns in comparative religion chapter eight, *Religion of the Semites*, Robertson Smith p125, p169, p174-8, *Semitic and Hamitic Origins*, Barton p122 - 127.

³⁶⁶ Henninger, "Über Sternkunde und Sternkult in Nord-und Zentralarabien", *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 79 (1954), *Die altarabishe Mondreligion*, D. Nielsen, Strasbourg (1904), "Der Semitische Venuskult", D. Nielsen, *ZDMG* 66 (1912), *The Tombs and Moon Temple of Huweidha*, G. Caton-Thompson, (1944), "Zur Frage eines Astralkultes im vorislamischen Arabien", T. Seichensticker *ZDMG* 136, (1986).

³⁶⁷ A full account of the history of the Jews of Arabia can be found in G. Darnell Newby's *A History of the Jews of Arabia* (1988). *The Jews of Islam* by B. Lewis also notes the early history of the communities. See also Lecker *Muslims, Jews and Pagans, Studies in Early Islamic Medina* (1995).

³⁶⁸ Watt seemed to show some uncertainty over whether there were Jews living in Mecca immediately before Islam, and suggests that any who did live there would have been pro-Persian in their political affiliations ("Makka as a Springboard for the Call of Islam", p24).

There were Christians living in the Arab world, including in the environs of Mecca. Though not a great presence in the Hejaz, larger numbers lived in the northern Arab lands. In fact, it is said that three of the four 'Men who withdrew' in Mecca became Christian³⁶⁹, so Christianity must have been a religion with which the people had in some contact³⁷⁰. Though the Christians were not as numerous as perhaps some other groups, there could have been a Christian influence on the Hejaz during the last few centuries before Islam.

The relations between the Arabs and the Byzantine empire have been discussed at great length by Shahīd³⁷¹. The contact between the Hejaz and Byzantium mean there was potential for a Christian influence. The two cities with which Shahīd identifies close relations in the fifth century being Mecca and Najran³⁷². The Christians of Najran and their conversion to the faith are mentioned in Arabic sources³⁷³, however, there does not appear to be much to suggest that Mecca was a major centre of Christianity. The comparative lack of Christians in Mecca does not mean that their ideas were unknown to Meccan society.

In addition to this possible Christian influence from the Byzantine empire, the possible filtration of Sassanian religious ideas should be considered. While there appears to be less obvious Sassanian influence on Arabia, the tribe of Tamīm, who

³⁶⁹ Ibn Hishām vol.1 p222-32 (p99-103 in translation). Waraqa b. Naufal (cousin of Khadīja bint Khuwaylid, Muḥammad's first wife), Ubaydallah b. Jahsh and 'Uthmān b. al-Huwayrith all became Christian. 'Uthmān, according to Ibn Hishām, went on to achieve high office under the Byzantine emperor on account of his conversion. The fourth 'man who withdrew' was Zayd b. 'Amr b. Nufayl, who it appears was a hanifite (see below for brief discussion of Hanifiyya movement).

³⁷⁰ Christianity in the peninsula discussed by Trimmingham, *Christianity in Pre-Islamic Arabia*. See also Bell, *The Origins of Islam in its Christian Environment*.

³⁷¹ *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fourth Century* and *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century*. Shahīd's work is useful as it considers both Arab and Byzantine sources.

³⁷² Watt believed that to be Christian in Mecca in the 6th century was a political gesture and implied a pro-Byzantine policy ("Makka as a Springboard for the Call of Islam", *Studies in the History of Arabia* vol. III 1989).

³⁷³ Ibn Hishām vol. I p31-4 (p14-15 in translation).

are not inconsequential in the history of the region³⁷⁴ and the early days of Islam may have been Magian³⁷⁵. The influence of Persia will not be specifically discussed here³⁷⁶.

A word must also be given to the possible indigenous monotheism of the peninsula. Notwithstanding the mythological belief in the original monotheism of the people of Mecca³⁷⁷, it does appear that there were monotheists living in Arabia prior to Islam who were not members of any other religious group³⁷⁸, and there is some evidence that there was a belief in a supreme deity in spite of the acceptance of other deities³⁷⁹. In addition to this, there was a group of people who shunned all pagan idols, spoke out against infanticide, avoided blood and dead animals³⁸⁰. These people are referred to as Hanifites, that is, followers of the religion of Abraham³⁸¹.

In addition to the Hanifiyya were a group based in Mecca who called themselves the Ḥums. The Ḥums were a religious group consisting of tribesmen of Quraysh, Kināna, Khuza'a, and 'Amr ibn Ṣa'sa'a. They excluded from their rituals anything which was not based on the cult of the Ka'ba itself. They claimed to be followers of the religion of Abraham. They enforced stringent rules on the muhrim,

³⁷⁴ A discussion of the tribe of Tamīm may be found in "Mecca and Tamīm, Aspects of their relations" MJ Kister, *JESHO*, 8, (1965).

³⁷⁵ Morony, p280.

³⁷⁶ There were Persian colonies in Arabia in this period, the function of which appears to have been trade and also Persian influences on South Arabia and eastern peninsula in particular cannot be ruled out. However, it seems that the majority of contact was with other western Semitic areas to the north and west for trade. It could be therefore suggested that the influence from these people would be stronger than from another non-Arab source which would be considerably more alien than the distant cousin relationship which may have been perceived with other groups along the trade routes north (Crone, p49).

³⁷⁷ This belief that the Meccans were initially monotheistic and polytheism developed out of migration of sections of the population to new places due to socio-economic pressures is described in ibn al-Kalbī's *Kitāb al-Aṣnām*.

³⁷⁸ HAR Gibb, "Pre-Islamic Monotheism in Arabia", *Harvard Theological Review* 4 (1962).

³⁷⁹ W. Montgomery-Watt "Belief in a High God in Pre-Islamic Mecca", *JSS* 16 (1971)

³⁸⁰ For example Zayd b. 'Amr b. Nufayl, the last of the four men mentioned in Ibn Hishām as rejecting the polytheism of their society (p99).

³⁸¹ E.g. Uri Rubin, "The Hanifiyya and the Ka'ba" *JSAI* 13, (1990). Faris and Glidden, "Development of the Meaning of Koranic Hanif" *JPOS* 19, (1939).

forbidding the clarifying of butter for example, and most importantly, they held the monopoly on the garments which could be worn whilst performing ṭawāf. Of them relatively little is known, other than they declared themselves the true followers of the religion of Abraham. They appear to have identified particularly with the shrine at Mecca, even to the exclusion of the rituals which actually formed the pilgrimage in this period³⁸².

This monotheistic presence in Arabia before Muḥammad began to preach is considered a partial explanation for the rapid acceptance of Islam. Beeston believed that only in an environment where it was becoming increasingly socially acceptable to abandon traditional forms of religion would it have been possible to have affiliated oneself to the new cult³⁸³. He refers to this monotheistic tendency as henotheism, that is, one god received special worship of a group or individual without denying the existence or value of other deities³⁸⁴.

Watt alludes to what he calls 'tribal humanism' which he believes to have been a strong spiritual force for those still living in the desert. The emphasis of this belief was on fatalism and the importance of tribal ethics and nobility³⁸⁵.

Religious Officials.

³⁸² Peters, *The Ḥajj* p36/7/8. The Hums were tribesmen of Quraysh, Kināna, Khuza'a and 'Amr b. Ṣaṣa'a, that is, from an allied tribal group. They imposed certain taboos on themselves, such as the prohibition on wearing normal garments whilst in the haram and it seems that they tried to impose them on others who came to perform the rituals which lay within Mecca itself. Although Muḥammad claimed to be a member of this group, when revealing the final form of the Islamic Hajj, he did not try to exclude the rituals which took place outside the ḥarām area.

³⁸³ Beeston, "Himyarite Monotheism" p151 *Studies in Pre-Islamic Arabia* vol.I (1989).

³⁸⁴ Beeston, "Himyarite Monotheism", p153.

³⁸⁵ W. Montgomery-Watt, "Makka as a Springboard for the Call of Islam" p3.

A common feature of many religions is a requirement for specialists to act as intermediaries between the individual and the divine. In ancient Arabian society it appears that there were several different types of cult official, of which Toufic Fahd made a study in his book *La Divination Arabe*³⁸⁶. In addition to specific religious intermediaries there were other sacred offices attached to shrines³⁸⁷.

The cult officials of pagan Arabia are usually discussed in their context as part of the Semitic religious tradition. This is a relevant and useful comparison as the Biblical prophets are the best documented near relation, but it must always be remembered that they were a distinct civilisation which may have functioned in a rather different way. The fact that the social structure was becoming increasingly divergent between the adherents of the Hebrew cult and the pagan Arab cults means that the cult officials may have changed in function too. An obvious note to make here is the hierarchical nature of post-exilic priesthood, something which does not appear to have existed in Arabia. The Arabs also did not have a priesthood in the

³⁸⁶Toufic Fahd, *La Divination Arabe* Leiden (1966). The two secondary sources on Semitic prophecy and divination to which Fahd refers mostly are Guillaume, *Prophecy and Divination among the Hebrews and other Semites*, (1938) and Haldar, *Associations of the Cult Prophets among the Ancient Semites*, (1945). While there appear to have been numerous different types of intermediary in the Arab world, it seems that the distinctions between them had latterly become very blurred so as to make one intermediary quite similar to another. While Fisher in his article on the *Kāhin* for the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* rightly notes that the *kāhin* appeared to have been higher in the hierarchy of intermediaries than mere diviners, it seems that the only distinction was that the diviner would use auguries to interpret answers while a *kāhin* would use a familiar spirit or jinn as their guide. While this may be correct in many cases it is worth noting that the *‘ārifa*, which will be described below in the account of the near-sacrifice of ‘Abd Allah, was not a diviner, but had a familiar spirit. Her designation as an *‘ārifa* would have otherwise implied that she used a means of divination, something which she does not appear to have done. It may be that at some stage the distinctions between the various types of intermediary were clearly defined, but certainly latterly it seems that they were not. In the same way, the terms *hājib* and *sādin* appear to be virtually synonymous in the remaining sources, though it may be speculated that they were once distinct. Thus, in this discussion the term *kāhin/a* has been used unless the person in the text is specifically named as another type of intermediary, even when the text seems to suggest another type of intermediary. For the purposes of this discussion the exact term is of less importance than the fact that these individuals existed at all.

³⁸⁷For a discussion of cult personnel in Mecca see Hawting, "The Sacred Offices of Mecca" *JSAI* 13 (1990).

same sense as one may have found in the Temple in Jerusalem. Comparisons between the biblical Kohen and Arab kāhin have been made previously, and demonstrated to be different, although quite probably stemming from the same function.

Intermediaries in Arabia appear to share certain common features making the distinctions between prophets, soothsayers and diviners often quite subtle, nay imperceptible³⁸⁸. Fahd put this as follows “entre divination et prophetie il existe une certaine continuité”³⁸⁹. The prophet (nabī) and soothsayer (kāhin/ kāhina) are both inspired by an unseen force, both are often ecstatic and speak in rhymed speech. The difference between the two might be explained by reference to the English word prophet and its Greek root, prophetes. The Greek term means to ‘speak forth’, that is, the Prophet will have a specific message which he, or she, will tell unsolicited³⁹⁰. A soothsayer or kāhin answers questions posed to them by clients, though the means of answering the question may be the same as that of the prophet, i.e. a familiar spirit.

Another member of the tribe who appeared often similar to both the prophet and the soothsayer was the poet, as will be shown. The coming to light of a poet was often heralded by the possession of the individual by a spirit, which Jones describes as analogous to the Greek daimon³⁹¹. This partnership with a jinn or familiar spirit is the way in which they became endowed with their abilities, for example Ḥasan b. Thābit began his poetic career when a female spirit leapt upon him

³⁸⁸ Lindblom proposed that the kāhin represented the prophetic type at a primitive stage, but there appears to be little difference.

³⁸⁹ Fahd p63.

³⁹⁰ Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* (1973) p1 and Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* p22.

³⁹¹ Jones vol.2 p1.

commanding him to recite verse³⁹². The mental state of the poet and the religious intermediary is very similar from a psychological point of view as both are inspired³⁹³.

All the intermediaries between the supernatural and man used similar forms of speech. The power of words was known to the Arabs. As Hitti wrote, "the rhyme, the music, produce on them an effect of what they call lawful magic"³⁹⁴ which may be a meaningful comment on the power of words used by specific persons, including intermediaries. It appears that the most common type of speech of the *kāhin/a* was *sajʿ*, or short sentences in rhythmic prose with an alternate or regular rhyme scheme³⁹⁵.

An example of the power of speech held by a poet is found from the legends surrounding the life of Labīd, the composer of one of the *muʿallaqāt*. As a young man, Labīd accompanied a delegation of the Banū Jaʿfār under his paternal uncle to the court of the Lakhmid king al-Nuʿman at Hīra. The men of the tribe found the king with al-Rabīʿa b. Ziyād al-ʿAbsī, an enemy of theirs, who poisoned the mind of the king against them. The men returned to their camp, and told Labīd, who had stayed behind to mind the camels, what happened. They tested his poetic abilities

³⁹² Andrae *Mohammed, The Man and his Faith* p27. This physical attack must be seen as reminiscent of the beginning of Muḥammad's prophetic career. According to Muslim tradition this was an encounter with the angel Gabriel on Mount Hīra who flung him across the cave commanding him to recite.

³⁹³ Lindblom p2.

³⁹⁴ Quoted by Jones, vol.2 p2.

³⁹⁵ This type of speech was most commonly used and regular speech was very rare. In addition to this, Fisher pointed out that there was a mysterious humming noise which was also thought to be a way in which the intermediary communicated with the spirit, *zamzama* (EI²). This is of course an intriguing word as it seems to be of the same origin as Zamzam, the well in the sanctuary at Mecca. It is known that oracles were taken in the region of the Kaʿba, both in it and in the surrounding area. It may be that the well had an ancient association with oracles and this may explain its name, and also may explain the large number of offerings found in it when it was dug by ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib of which more will be said in the next chapter.

and the following morning they shaved his head, leaving his forelock intact, dressed him in a ḥullah and brought him before the king. He recited poetry in front of the king and al-Rābī'a, to which al-Rābī'a tried to insult Labīd back by decrying his mother which resulted in al-Rābī'a being sent away in disgrace³⁹⁶.

While the historicity of the account may be questionable, as are all legends, it does describe the perceived power of poetry for the benefit of the tribe. This may be interpreted only as a form of artistic propaganda, were it not for the preparation which was made for the verbal duel between Labīd and al-Rabī'a. The shaving of Labīd's head seems to imply a consecration for battle, and the first few lines of his verse seem to imply that very state:

Is my head to be shaved for battle every day?
Many a battle day is better
Than a day of ease³⁹⁷

The matter of head shaving before going to war has been noted in the previous chapter when the men of the tribe would have their heads shaved so as to distinguish themselves, though here it seems to carry a stronger ritual implication beyond being recognisable in the thick of battle³⁹⁸. The dressing of the young poet in a ḥullah too implies that he was being ceremonially prepared for a ritual performance. All of this seems to add to the suggestion here that the power of the words coming from the young poet were to be treated respectfully and with awe. This implies some quasi-magical significance³⁹⁹. As McDonald noted, poetry could, in certain circumstances, have been used as a substitute for bloodshed⁴⁰⁰. It appears

³⁹⁶ Agh 16: 5723. It is not stated in the text, but the insult to Labīd's mother may have been the most influential part of this exchange as she was from the same tribe as the king and therefore an insult to her may have been taken as an insult to the king himself.

³⁹⁷ Ibid.

³⁹⁸ See chapter six for a discussion of religious symbolism in battle.

³⁹⁹ The possibility of consecration for warfare is discussed in chapter six.

⁴⁰⁰ McDonald, "Orally Transmitted Poetry" *JAL* 9 (1978).

here that this may have been the case, as normally an insult to the nobility and honour of the tribe may have met violent response, but here there is a display of verse.

Interestingly, Muḥammad appears to have been against those who tried to speak eloquently, as this tradition demonstrates;

Abū Huraira reported that the Apostle of Allah as saying: On the day of resurrection Allah will not accept repentance or ransom from him who learns excellence of speech to captivate thereby the hearts of men or of people⁴⁰¹

It is also narrated on the authority of ʿAbd Allah b. ʿUmar that when two men came from the east and made a speech which charmed people because of its eloquence Muḥammad had said that "in eloquent speech there is magic"⁴⁰².

This belief in magic existing in speech may be illustrated by the story of Umm Jamīl and her confrontation with Muḥammad⁴⁰³. Umm Jamīl was the sister of Abū Sufyān⁴⁰⁴ and wife of Abū Lahāb⁴⁰⁵. As such she appears to have been a powerful figure in the Meccan social scene. In this incident, Muḥammad and Abū Bakr were sitting together when Umm Jamīl approached them, with a pestle in her hand reciting verse about Muḥammad and his religion. Abū Bakr was very afraid of her, though Muḥammad claimed he could protect himself by reciting the Qurʾān. It is written that by so doing he made himself temporarily invisible to Umm Jamīl so

⁴⁰¹ *Sunān* Abū Dāʿūd chapter 1801, 4980 p 1392/3.

⁴⁰² *Sunān* Abū Dāʿūd chapter 1801, 4989 p 1393.

⁴⁰³ Ibn Hishām vol. 1 p354-55 (p161-2 in translation).

⁴⁰⁴ Abū Suyfān b. Ḥarb was a prominent Qurayshī nobleman, and he was the father of Muʿāwiya.

⁴⁰⁵ For an analysis of the role of Abū Lahāb in the movement against Muḥammad and the Qurʾānic verses in which he is mentioned see Rubin, "Abū Lahāb and Sura CXI" *BSOAS* 62, (1979). He was a strong supporter of the goddesses Allāt and al-ʿUzzā.

she could not see him to attack him. It is said that the verse he recited at that moment was sūra al-Masad (111), the Palm Fire;

The power of Abū Lahāb will perish, and he will perish,
His wealth and gains will not exempt him,
He will be plunged into the flaming fire
And his wife the wood carrier,
Will have upon her neck a halter of palm-fire⁴⁰⁶

This sūra is meaningful for two main reasons. This is the only instance in the Qur'ān of Muḥammad attacking people by name. The line Abū Lahāb will perish and he will perish has become part of Muslim prayer. The couple were obviously well known in the city and strong critics of Islam from the very beginning as this is an early Meccan sura and for Muḥammad to attack them personally they must have been a source of a great deal of trouble for him. It is known that Abū Lahāb was a staunch supporter of the cult of al-'Uzzā the great deity of the Quraysh.

Returning to Umm Jamīl herself, she had a great dislike of Muḥammad and it is recorded that she would sprinkle thorns on the ground in places where she knew Muḥammad liked to walk barefoot⁴⁰⁷. In this incident she appears to be attempting to put some kind of spell on Muḥammad. It seems that Umm Jamīl was able to use words and perhaps some ritual involving grinding stones in her hand to achieve this, as al-Ṭabarī said in his commentary on this verse describing Umm Jamīl, she was a woman who literally "put evil in her speech"⁴⁰⁸.

This helps to demonstrate the idea of the power of speech, especially any kind of recited verse, among the Arabs of the time. The confrontation between

⁴⁰⁶ Translation - Pickthall. The reference to Abū Lahāb losing his power appears to be referring to an incident when he had lain in wait for Muḥammad to throw stones at him (Ibn Hishām vol.1 p299, p.135 in translation).

⁴⁰⁷ Al-Ṭabarī *Tafsīr*, sūra al-Masad.

⁴⁰⁸ Al-Ṭabarī *Tafsīr*, sūra al-Masad.

Umm Jamīl and Muḥammad appears almost to be a demonstration by Muḥammad that he had more powerful magic than she did.

Witchcraft appears to have been a sphere in which women were also active, although both sexes could use witchcraft. Sūra al-Falāq (113) warns mankind to beware of the women who blow on knots, a traditional form of ritual magic⁴⁰⁹.

The idea of power in speech and being able to cast spells on persons of the enemy is an idea which seem to have permeated Near Eastern Society even after the establishment of all three monotheistic faiths which appear to have largely outlawed the use of such persons except in highly exceptional circumstances. An example of this is found from the chronicles of William of Tyre, describing a notable day from the Crusaders siege of Jerusalem:

among the other machines outside the walls, the Christians had one which caused dreadful slaughter among the defenders by the violent impetus with which it hurled forth rocks of enormous weight. When the infidels perceived that no skill of theirs could prevail against this, they brought two sorceresses to bewitch it and by their magic incantations render it powerless. These women were engaged in magic rites and divinations on the wall when suddenly a huge millstone from that very large engine struck them . They, together with three girls who attended them, were crushed to death and their lifeless bodies dashed from the wall. At this sight a great applause rose from the ranks of the Christian army and exultation filled the hearts in our camp. On the other hand deep sorrow fell on the people of Jerusalem because of that disaster⁴¹⁰.

⁴⁰⁹ Knot magic may have its origins in Mesopotamian magic rites (Campbell - Thompson p164). Pickthall translated the verse as "and from the evils of malignant witchcraft", which he footnoted as "from the evil of the blowers (female) on knots" (p455), noting that in ancient Arabia it was a common form of witchcraft to tie knots in a cord and then blow on them with an incantation. In Babylon, it was believed that witches could strangle their victims or seal their mouths by tying knots, and the spell would be broken by untying them (ERE s.v. knots), while the Assyrian Maqlu rituals suggests the burning of the knots to release the victim from the spell ("Women and Witchcraft in Ancient Assyria", Rollin, from *Images of Women in Antiquity* p42). The Assyrians also would use knot magic to keep the dead from annoying the living (ERE s.v.knots), which may have interesting possibilities for Arabian knot magic if they wanted to keep evil jinn away.

⁴¹⁰ William Archbishop of Tyre *A History of the Deeds Done Beyond the Sea*, vol. 1 trans. Babcock and Krey, Columbia University Press 1943 p365.

This is probably not an accurate account as in this period as it would be highly improbable for witchcraft to be condoned, even though certain Islamic commentators have made a case for the legitimacy of *ruqayya*. However, it may be suggested that this anecdote does describe an event which took place, but with an incorrect interpretation.

It may be noted that William of Tyre knew Arabic and may have had knowledge of this as an old tradition or piece of history from some time in the far past and inserted the anecdote here to add local colour or to imply something about the inhabitants of Jerusalem. There would appear to be a direct continuity of the model seen of twin females attended by other females who were believed to have some supernatural power⁴¹¹.

What is more likely however, is that there were women reciting verse upon the battlements, and that they were thought by the Christians to be witches. While the practice of *siḥr* magic was outlawed, *ruqāyya* was still permitted, and what may have been the case here is that the activity of the women in the text was based on an early non-Islamic practice which had acquired Islamic respectability by using Qur'ānic incantations instead of those pagan verses which may have been used by such groups in times passed.

The ability to see into the future is of great importance to the Arabs. They appear to have sought consultations on not just those matters to come, but also on what course of action to take in certain situations.

The legend of the destruction of the dam at Mā'rib contains an example of a *kāhina*⁴¹². Mā'rib was the ancient capital of the Sabean kingdom in South Arabia,

⁴¹¹ This will be discussed further in chapter five.

⁴¹² Nicholson, p15-6. Ibn Hishām vol. 1 p13-14 (curiously this is not to be found in the Guillaume translation).

famous as the alleged seat of the Queen of Sheba. The dam there was said to be one of the sources of the wealth and fertility of the land, and indeed it is known that the dam did exist because its ruins are still visible today. The dam was said to have been breached during the 4th century, but thanks to the intervention of the king's wife, all were saved from the disaster. The king, ʿAmr b. ʿĀmir was married to Zarīfa and she appears to have been in some way able to see the future. The sources do not give her a particular title, that is, it is not known for certain whether she was seen to be a *kāhina* or not, though her story indicates that she may have been. The story goes that she dreamt one night of a rat digging at the base of the dam and moving away rocks with its hind legs. She told her husband to go and look at the dam, and if indeed there was a rat then the dam would collapse. The king went and looked at the dam and sure enough there was a rat there just as she had predicted. The king decided to leave the kingdom but to avoid suspicion he held a banquet to which he invited all the citizens and at it he had a staged fight with his son, during which the boy struck him. The king said he wanted to have him executed, but the people pleaded with him to be merciful, not knowing that it was pre-arranged. The king said he could not bear to stay in a place where he could be so insulted and made preparations to leave, selling all his belongings. However, before finally departing he told the people of the impending danger and led them away to safety.

This story would appear to be perhaps rather mythological and thus perhaps as a metaphor for aspects of Sabaean society⁴¹³. It also seems that this would have brought about a period of economic difficulty for the people of the kingdom as it was one of the sources of their relative affluence. Beyond the mythological account,

⁴¹³ Stetkevych wrote that the destruction of the dam by rats was a metaphor for the socio-economic collapse of the kingdom p 24.

which is that presented in the standard Muslim histories, it is impossible to say how far this narrative deviates from fact. However, it demonstrates that it was not inconceivable that a king would be willing to take the advice of his *kāhin*, even when it was a woman, that she was his wife notwithstanding.

From the ancestry of Muḥammad there is another instance of a *kāhina* at work, in this case she could be said to have saved the life of his father ‘Abd Allah⁴¹⁴. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, Muḥammad’s grandfather, vowed that if she had ten sons grow up and protect him, he would sacrifice one of them to Allah at the Ka’ba. He drew lots from them at the oracle of Hubal and the one to be sacrificed was ‘Abd Allah⁴¹⁵. He went to perform this, when some men of Quraysh came out from their assembly and instructed him not to. Al-Mughīra b. ‘Abd Allah, a kinsman of ‘Abd Allah’s mother, said that they would ransom the boy against this with whatever they had. The men of Quraysh were against it as if they allowed this sacrifice to happen then others might get the same idea and then there would be trouble. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib was ordered to go to a *kāhina* who had a familiar spirit for a consultation. They did this, and she said to take the boy back to Mecca and draw lots between him and camels, increasing the number of beasts each time until the god was satisfied. This they did, and ‘Abd Allah was saved, at the cost of a hundred camels⁴¹⁶.

The *kāhina* in this anecdote was said to have told the men of Quraysh to go away and return the following day once her spirit had been to her. This implies that she did not practice any mechanical means of divination to receive her answers from

⁴¹⁴ Ibn Hishām vol. 1 p154 (p67 in translation). She is actually referred to in the account given on the authority of Ibn Ishāq as an *‘ārifā laha tāb* or a ‘knower’ with a familiar spirit. The distinction between this and a *kāhina* seems slight.

⁴¹⁵ Ibn Hishām vol.1 p152-3 (p151 in translation).

⁴¹⁶ Ibn Hishām vol.1 p151-55 (p67-8 in translation).

a spirit or deity, but that she was an ecstatic who had to wait for revelation to come to her.

As well as spirit possession, one of the ways in which “revelations” could come to an intermediary was through dreams. It appears that Muḥammad himself placed some store by dreams and their meaning, as he might, given that some of the earlier revelations were received whilst sleeping. There are ḥadīth which state that dreams are one fortieth of prophecy, but only if they are the dreams of the faithful believer:

Ubayda b. al-Ṣamt said that he had heard The Prophet say "the good dreams of a faithful believer is a part of the forty-six parts of prophetism"⁴¹⁷.

This proviso for the good nature of dreams may be an indication that Muḥammad was aware that dreams could be used to foretell events by kawāhin and in order to prevent any others from claiming a part of his mandate he stated that this was firstly only a small part of prophethood and also that this only is the case when the person is a faithful believer. The implication of the statement being that if the person isn't a believer then the dreams are worthless and if they are a believer then the dreams do not count as prophecy in the true sense as there can be only one Prophet⁴¹⁸. The word used in this anecdote for dream is *ru'waya*, which also has the meaning vision, which may well indicate that dreams were indeed portents of future events.

It is related that before the Yaum Mujazzal al-Amrar the B. Bakr b.Wā'il were camped in the neighbourhood of al-Mujazzal. A girl of the Banū Shayban dreamt that she saw a sword and a bowstring and thus knew that the enemy would attack at dawn.⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁷ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī vol. 9 p96, also Sunān Abū Dā'ūd chapter 1803, 5000, p1395.

⁴¹⁸ See for example Y. Friedman, "Finality of Prophethood in Sunni Islam" *JSAI* 7, 1986.

⁴¹⁹ Lichtenstädter p17, citing Naqā'id p335. The Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī also contains a reference to dreaming about swords and it represented the death of many people (vol. 9 p133).

One interesting anecdote in which the idea of a prophetess is proposed in jest is the story of ʿĀtika bint ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib⁴²⁰ and her dreams. This story is found in both Ibn Hishām and al-Wāqidī, therefore one may assume that it was a commonly known tale⁴²¹. Three days before Ḍamḍam arrived ʿĀtika had a vision of a rider on a camel who halted in the valley and cried 'Come forth O people, do not leave your men to face a disaster that will come in three days'. The people flocked to him and he went to the Kaʿba and he and his camel leapt onto it and he called out the same words. His camel then went up Abū Qubays⁴²² and he called out the same words. He seized a rock and loosened it and the mountain spilt into pieces. She told her brother al-ʿAbbās about it and he told al-Walīd b. ʿUtba who told his father and everybody then knew. Abū Jāhl said to Al-ʿAbbās 'O Banū ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib since when have you had a prophetess among you?' and added "Are you not satisfied that your men should play prophet that your women should do so also?"⁴²³. This story is also told in Kitāb al-Munammaq in almost identical form, though in it the account of her being mocked by Abū Jāhl is not included, instead there is a statement by ʿAmr b. ʿAbbās confirming her vision as accurate⁴²⁴.

ʿĀtika did not claim that she was a prophetess, nor did anyone else, as far as can be seen, suggest that she was one either and this was simply Abū Jāhl mocking Muḥammad's close kin. This part of the story would appear to cast a different light

⁴²⁰ She was therefore a cousin of Muḥammad.

⁴²¹ Jones studied the two versions of this story and concluded that there had been no plagiarism of the original Ibn Ishāq version by al-Wāqidī. He concluded that both probably received their versions, which are very similar, from professional storytellers ("Ibn Ishāq and al-Wāqidī: The Dream of ʿĀtika and the raid on Nakhla in Relation to the charge of Plagiarism", *BSOAS* 22 1959).

⁴²² A mountain in the environs of Mecca.

⁴²³ Ibn Hishām vol. 2 p607-9 (p290-1 in translation).

⁴²⁴ Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb al-Munammaq* p 419-20.

on ʿĀtika's vision from the account given by Ibn Ḥabīb. The Ibn Ḥabīb version of the story seems to be giving more legitimacy to ʿĀtika as a person who could have visions⁴²⁵. It seems that perhaps Abū Jāhl mocked ʿĀtika not because he did not have any faith in her but rather because he wanted to mock Muḥammad and they were cousins so she was an easy target for his derision.

All forms of divination were outlawed by Muḥammad. Islam certainly took very strongly against all persons claiming to be kawāhin. The ḥadīth contain numerous examples of prohibitions on the use of kawāhin and indeed any other methods of divination, which perhaps suggests that their use was widespread and popular. Muḥammad, of course, would have wished to eradicate these religious officials as they were directly in opposition to himself. If he truly was a prophet, then these people were distracting the population from Allah and were spreading lies received from evil jinn. If he were another soothsayer, as was initially suggested by the Meccans, then he was in competition with them to have his messages heard over theirs. Consulting the kawāhin meant that the people did not trust Muḥammad's revelations and had no faith in Allah. His prohibition on kawāhin extended to all forms of divination. It is narrated that Muḥammad said that anyone who resorts to divination and believes what is said has no part of the revelation⁴²⁶, and also that any augury taken from the flight of birds or pessomancy pertained to divination⁴²⁷. That these two were specifically singled out may suggest that they were two forms of divination about which Muḥammad may have been specifically asked, or perhaps

⁴²⁵ Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb al-Munammaq* p420.

⁴²⁶ *Sunān* Abū Dā'ūd, *Kitāb al-Kahānah wa al-Tatayyur*, chapter 1479, 3895 on the authority of Abū Huraira.

⁴²⁷ *Sunān* Abū Dā'ūd, *Kitāb al-Kahānah wa al-Tatayyur* chapter 1479, 3898. In Ibn Hishām it is said that Muḥammad liked auguries, but that he did not take any oracle from the flight of birds (Ibn Hishām vol.3 p64, p372 in translation).

because they were methods of divination which were specifically associated with a popular cult. Another point to note here with regard to al-ʿUzzā is, that the Banāt Allah were referred to in the Qurʾān as Numibian Cranes. It may be that as bird flight was a means of divination through which the goddesses were thought to give oracles. In commentary to a piece of poetry in the Sīra of Muḥammad, Dr Arafat claimed that the bird of ill omen in the verse was actually the soul of a murder victim⁴²⁸, which was presumably a reference to the hama⁴²⁹. Although the bird here was the bringer of bad news, birds could bring good news, as in the dream of al-Tufayl b. ʿAmt al-Dausī, who dreamt of a bird flying out of his mouth and going into a womb was a good omen⁴³⁰.

It is reported by Muʿāwiya b. al-Ḥakam al-Sulamī that he asked Muḥammad about the things they used to do in former times and one of these was using kawahin. Muḥammad said "don't visit kāhins", but curiously when he was asked about taking omens he said "that is a sort of personal whim of yours, so let it not prevent you from doing a thing"⁴³¹.

This ability of the religious intermediary, by whatever name they were known, to see the future and possibly influence it by magical means, leads to the possibility that they were leaders in their community. It must be noted that the kawahin were a powerful group in society, although they do not appear to have functioned as a guild in the same way as in other parts of the Semitic world. The

⁴²⁸ Ibn Hishām vol. 1 p378 (p173 in translation). Arafat was the translator of the poetry in the Guillaume translation of the *Life of Muḥammad*.

⁴²⁹ The Hama was believed to be a bird in which the soul of a murder victim would take. Such a bird would be seen over the grave of the dead person and utter curses until the death was avenged. Muḥammad's prohibition on the belief in the hama comes at the same time as the prohibition on evil omens, safar, ghouls and rain-bringing stars (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim vol. iv Kitāb as-Salama, chapter CMXXXI p1206) .

⁴³⁰ Ibn Hishām vol.2 p400 (p177 in translation).

⁴³¹ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim p1209 chapter CMXXXIII, 5532.

status of the poet amongst the tribe may be indicated by the story of a young man refused by his beloved on the grounds that he was neither a poet, nor a soothsayer nor a water-diviner⁴³². This anecdote demonstrates perhaps the three most influential persons in the tribe outside it may be speculated the family of the tribal sheikh, were three people who essentially were in many ways the same person. Poets could be soothsayers who could be water-diviners⁴³³. The connection appears to be that any person with a known connection to the supernatural was immediately placed above in the tribal hierarchy those who did not.

A good Biblical comparison of a woman intermediary who had a role in tribal leadership is that of Deborah⁴³⁴. One of her functions as a prophetess was to give guidance and act as a judge arbiter for the people who came to her. This is a role which was also filled by the intermediaries of Arabia, as will now be discussed.

The *kāhin/a* was the person to whom the people would turn for the resolution of disputes or for the answers to questions. As a result of their divine connection, it seems that it was assumed that they would know the correct answers to the questions set and judge fairly. As noted earlier in this chapter, the day to day religion of the people of Arabia was mostly concerned with the smooth running of society and for the resolution of daily problems, from the source of their bad luck to the murderer of a kinsman or whereabouts of a lost animal. Thus in order to have satisfactory outcomes to these situations the *kāhin* would be consulted, as well as on

⁴³² Nicholson, p72, quoting Arabum Proverbia ii, 494.

⁴³³ It may be interesting here to note that ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib was told where to dig for the well of Zamzam whilst sleeping in the harām. This indicates the importance of dreams as a method of intermediacy, and also perhaps shows that to sleep in an area of cultic importance was thought to help induce such revelations. It may be remembered that before the *isra’* and the *mi’raj* Muḥammad went to sleep also in the shadow of the Ka‘ba.

⁴³⁴ Judges 4.

larger matters of tribal policy and action⁴³⁵. It is known that Muḥammad was invited to Medina on account of his perceived ability to receive supernatural guidance. It seems in Mecca too before the anti- Muḥammad sentiment grew too powerful, he acted as an arbiter among the people because he was regarded as most trustworthy. Given the nature of Muḥammad's revelations it is not surprising that he was often regarded by the Meccans as being just another soothsayer and therefore not taken too seriously⁴³⁶. Jones observed that the language of the kawāhin was a combination of the language of poetry and colloquial speech, and as the Qur'ān is neither poetry nor regular speech then it "must have been akin to the register of the kahins"⁴³⁷. While obviously no Muslim source would describe him as a kāhin, his functions were so akin to theirs that even after the Hejira when his identification as the Prophet of Islam was established he was approached by the people to arbitrate "in the way of the Kāhins"⁴³⁸.

There are no explicit examples of women acting in this way in the sources, though there are two which may imply such actions. When Qusayy died, he divided up the responsibilities for the different social roles in Mecca, giving almost everything to his favourite son, 'Abd al-Dār. This was fought against by the mother

⁴³⁵ From Biblical examples it can be seen that the "prophets" of the early Biblical period during the times of Samuel were seen to perform such mundane tasks as these and had little to do with the fiery orations more commonly associated with the Biblical prophets. For example, Samuel's father lost his mule, and in order to find it he consulted a group of prophets congregated nearby.

⁴³⁶ At the time of the annual fair the Meccans asked al-Walīd b. Al-Mughīra to judge whether he was a kāhin or not so that they would all agree. 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib was afraid that Mecca would be overwhelmed by the people coming to see him (Ibn Hishām vol.1 p270, p121 in translation). Muḥammad had already had an encounter with a kāhin from Lihb who pronounced that he would have a great future (Ibn Hishām vol.1 p179-80, p79 in translation). Quraysh branded Muḥammad a soothsayer, diviner, poet or possessed (Ibn Hishām vol.1 p289, p130 in translation).

⁴³⁷ Jones, vol.2 p11.

⁴³⁸ Ibn Hishām vol.2 p526 (p245 in translation).

of Qusayy's four sons, Huda, who argued that something should be given to 'Abd Manāf who was the oldest. Some strife followed, but in the end matters were settled, and the factions, with their allies, called a truce and settled their pact. With the Banū 'Abd al-Dār were the Banū Saḥm and the Banū Jumaḥ b. 'Amr and the Banū Makhzūm b. Yagthut and Banu 'Adī b. Kalb and the Banū 'Amr b. Lu'ayy came out from al-Fariqin to join them and the Banū 'Abd Manāf and their allies called them 'Perfumed ones', and the Banū 'Abd al-Dār said to them 'Allies', and the women of the Banū 'Abd Manāf came out with a deep dish of perfume and they dipped their hands in it and were called the 'Perfumed Ones'⁴³⁹.

An anecdote from Herodotus which may also shed some light on the taking of an oath is as follows;

No nation regards the sanctity of a pledge more seriously than the Arabs. When two men wish to make a solemn compact, they get the service of a third, who stands between them and with a sharp stone cuts the palms of their hands near the base of the thumb; then he takes a little tuft of wool from their clothes, dips it in the blood and smears the blood on seven stones which lie between them, invoking as he does so, the names of Dionysius and Urania⁴⁴⁰

This quote appears to show that the services of a third party were required to perform a rite to seal the pact between the men. Herodotus does not discuss the nature of this person and if any particular type of person was thought to be required, but it may hint at some kind of semi-religious function by the invocation of the name of the deity to help bind the contract.

With regard to the use of blood in oath-taking, there was an incident which followed the affair of the Perfumed Ones at which a kāhina was present. After the

⁴³⁹ Ibn Hishām vol. 1 p132 (p54 in translation), Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb al-Munammaq* p20.

⁴⁴⁰ Herodotus p205.

incident related above, in which the tribes dipped their hands in perfume under the watch of the women of the Banū ʿAbd Manāf, the following happened;

they slaughtered other cattle and dipped their hands in the blood and they were called the confederates and the Blood Lickers because Aswad b. Haritha al-ʿAdī licked the blood and so did the others of the Banū ʿAdī with him.⁴⁴¹

This describes how these confederates became known also as the Blood Lickers.

After these events had occurred, they went to a *kahina* in Mecca and she said to them "you have made the work of the women dipping your hands in perfume and they make the work of men dipping their hands in blood"⁴⁴².

The approach to a *kāhina* in Mecca shows first that there were female cult operatives present in Mecca which were regarded in some esteem given the people who went to her after taking this oath. The pronouncement of the *kāhina* too is intriguing. Here she seems to be differentiating between the different people who took the oath. None of the Banū ʿAbd al-Dār took part in the blood licking, only in the perfume, this is clear by the use of *your* and *their* in the words of the *kāhina*.

In this capacity as a tribal leader, it is conceivable that the *kāhin/a* would have had to lead, or at least be present with, the forces in battle. Nicholson wrote that the *shāʿir* of the tribe was also the tribal oracle, guide in peace and champion in war⁴⁴³. This description seems more fitting to for a *kāhin/a* than for a poet, but again this illustrates the great similarity between the two members of the tribe. This type of role for a tribal intermediary is one which has a parallel in ancient Mesopotamia where the *bārū* would go into battle with the army of the king⁴⁴⁴. This role was also one in which the judge Deborah acted in Biblical times as demonstrated by her role

⁴⁴¹ Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb al-Munammaq* p 20.

⁴⁴² Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb al-Munammaq*, p20.

⁴⁴³ Nicholson, p73.

⁴⁴⁴ Wilson, p 92.

in the defeat of the Canaanites. She summoned Barak and he was commanded by God, through Deborah as an intermediary, to attack Sisera, the Canaanite general. In the verse which follows it states "I will lure Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his troops to the Kishon River and give him into your hands". This verse, while spoken by Deborah, is clearly her speaking as God, that is, it would seem that she was when pronouncing these verses in perhaps an ecstatic state in which the voice of God spoke through her commanding Barak in his task.

In response, Barak said that he would do as God commanded, but he would not go without Deborah. This behaviour has been interpreted by some commentators as 'unmanly'⁴⁴⁵, but it may be suggested that in fact he was merely requesting that as the oracle giver and therefore representative of God that Deborah was needed to accompany him to give divine guidance⁴⁴⁶. Deborah accompanied the army under his command and all the men of Sisera were killed except the commander himself who fled.

The song of Deborah commemorates the battle and was sung by Deborah and Barak.⁴⁴⁷ It appears to have a similar tone to those poems of the Arabs telling of their *ayyām*. The song mentions the singers at the watering hole which will recite the acts of the Lord and the righteous deeds of the warriors in the service of Israel,

⁴⁴⁵ Brown, p78.

⁴⁴⁶ Indeed, in extra-Biblical texts, this guidance from Deborah is seen to be even clearer than it is made in the Judges text. Deborah clearly is described as a visionary saying "I see the stars moved from their course and ready for battle on your side. Also I see the lightening that cannot be moved its course going forth to hinder the works of the chariots of those who glory in the might of Sisera". This pre-battle vision of the correct time to proceed with the Israelite attack on the Canaanite forces would indicate that Deborah's visionary and prophetic abilities were compatible with those seen in other Semitic societies (Brown p50 quoting Pseudo-Philo). It appears that Barak was perhaps unwilling to undertake action without the advice of Deborah, as at one point he appears to have hesitated and Deborah had to order him to go and fight the Canaanite saying that "This is the day the Lord has given Sisera into your hands. Has not the Lord gone ahead of you?" (Judges 4:14).

⁴⁴⁷ Brown, p39 ff.1. It is suggested that the song was originally sung only by Deborah and that Barak was a later addition to the verse.

which sounds reminiscent of the manner in which the ayyām of the Arabs may have been transmitted. So here again it may be demonstrated that the socio-cultural similarities between the Arabs and the early Biblical characters are more than merely passing.

The vital difference here between the war narrative of Deborah and the ayyam is that in the ayyām literature there is no explicit mention of the deity and how they won the day for their people. For all that the war song of Deborah celebrates the victory of the warriors, the poem which has survived is clearly in praise of God. The accounts of the ayyām do not contain this theme. There are references in the semi-historical narratives to the tribal deities of the Arabs, but they do not seem to have quite the same place of honour as the Israelite God⁴⁴⁸.

While it cannot be said that any of the women who appear in the pre-Islamic battle narratives or in later Islamic historical examples can be said to be direct equivalents of Deborah, she provides a useful comparison for the activities of the Arabian women in war in a religious context. Deborah is seen to fit some aspects of the model of Arabian cult women in battle, she is more obviously a religious figure than the Arabian women, few of whom are explicitly stated in the texts as having a religious purpose and their cultic function is implied by their actions and words.

It is possible that the Arab kâhinat might have behaved in the same way and an example of this is that of the “false-prophetess”, Sajāḥ. Sajāḥ bint al-Ḥārith b. Suwayd b. ʿUqfan was from the Banū Taghlib. She is derided by the Muslim sources

⁴⁴⁸ Why there is this theological variation between the two people who seem to have such similar practices in other ways may be attributable to several factors. It may be that the explicit references to God in the Deborah narrative are a later insertion to clarify the deity for whom Deborah was fighting and from whom she received her visions, though Israel was by this time monotheistic and the tribes appear to have been unified under the laws and belief in one God. Thus it is probable that the unifying deity was praised in Deborah's original poem, it is difficult to be sure. In spite of the monotheistic nature of the Israelites they were still the same tribal body which had moved into Canaan.

as a false prophetess as she came after Muḥammad and therefore could not actually be a prophet as there could be none after Muḥammad⁴⁴⁹. She claimed to be receiving visions from rabb al-Sirāb, or lord of the clouds, and after Muḥammad died, it is said that she pretended to be a prophetess among the Taghlib. She was able to mount a successful campaign of alliance formation and raiding against other tribes of the Jazīrah until she campaigned against al-Yamāmah. In al-Yamāmah at this time was Musaylimah⁴⁵⁰. He was in a difficult position, fighting wars against various other tribes, and "he feared that, if he busied himself with her, Thumamah would get the better of him in Hajr, or Shurahbil b. Hasanah or the tribes that were around them"⁴⁵¹, and thus would be an easy target for Sajāḥ. So he attempted to form an alliance with her by sending her gifts and then wrote requesting to meet with her but wanted her guarantee that he would not be harmed. According to al-Ṭabarī, when Sajāḥ went to him he locked the fortress door in front of her and Sajāḥ asked him to come down to her, which he agreed to do if she sent her men away. Musaylimah then ordered his men to erect a qubba for her and "perfume it to make her think of sex"⁴⁵². When she entered the tent, Musaylimah and she discussed

⁴⁴⁹ There are no acknowledged examples of women prophets among the accepted pre-Muḥammad prophets.

⁴⁵⁰ Musaylimah is called 'the liar' in al-Ṭabarī and also in Ibn Hishām vol. 4 p571 (p636 in translation). His orations are also discussed in *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*, p127.

⁴⁵¹ Al-Ṭabarī *Ta'rikh* I p 272 (vol.10 p93 translation by Donner).

⁴⁵² Al-Ṭabarī *Ta'rikh* I p 282 (vol.10 p94 translation by Donner). This phrase has also been transmitted as "perhaps she will mention marriage" or "he perfumed it so that the sweet smell would make her think of intercourse" (ff. p.94, Donner translation). It is interesting here that marriage and sexual relations seem to be synonymous in this context. Also here is an appearance of a qubba in a different role from that which is familiar from texts. Musaylimah used it as the place where he would meet with Sajāḥ to discuss their prophethood and potential alliance. Whether their alliance was consummated in the tent is not stated in the text, though if it were this would perhaps not be outwith received Semitic practice. The use of tents in marriage rituals in the middle east has a modern survival in the Jewish chuppa, which for a marriage to be solemnised is an essential feature. There may be a degree of this too implied by Arabic terms. Bayt, the Arabic for tent, is derived from the root *bāta* (Lane b-a-t) which means to spend the night, but can also refer to the

prophecy and their visions, which Balansi and Ibn Hubaysh describe as studying to see who was more entitled to prophethood⁴⁵³. Sajāḥ accepted that he was a prophet and he asked her to marry him which she also agreed to. Sajāḥ stayed with Musaylimah for three days and when she returned to her tribe her people were angry because he had married her without a dowry which they felt was shameful for one such as her. She went back to him and Musaylimah again locked the fortress in her face and asked what she wanted. She replied that she wanted a dowry, to which Musaylimah's response was to have her 'muezzin' sent to him and he instructed him that he, Musaylimah, had relieved them of the al-Asa prayer and the al-Figār prayer, and that this was her dowry. It is around here that the first part of the al-Ṭabarī account ends and his telling of the Sayf account begins, and it adds to Sajāḥ's story that she remained among the Banū Taghlib until the end of the first civil war when Mu'āwiya had crushed the army of 'Alī.

Although Sajāḥ spoke in rhymed prose, *saj'*, it may have been that she did not claim prophethood for herself and was not setting herself up to be anything other than a *kāhina* who was capable of leading her people as *kāhināt* had done before. This seems in contrast to Musaylimah who certainly seems to have perceived himself as a great prophet and when he issues his 'dowry' to Sajāḥ of relieving her and her people of the two prayers he calls himself the apostle of Allah⁴⁵⁴. She may have claimed to have been receiving her wisdom from a supernatural being, the *rabb al-sirāb*, but it does not mean that she saw herself as a prophet.

taking of a wife. This may be due to a Semitic idea that one of the ways to take a wife is by having intercourse with her.

⁴⁵³ Al-Ṭabarī *Ta'rikh* p94 ff.624.

⁴⁵⁴ Al-Ṭabarī *Ta'rikh* I p1283 (vol. 10 p274 translation by Donner).

The term *rab al-sirāb* too is interesting. The idea of a deity residing in clouds seems to have some degree of affinity with rain bringing stars and the deities which resided in them and so on, so there appears to have been a recognition of the earlier ideas about astral deities, which may in this case be limited to anything which dwells in the sky, as having a part in fertility. It may also be noted that Musaylimah refers to Sajāḥ's deity as the lord of the clouds and the rain⁴⁵⁵.

In the previous chapter the leadership of the Fazāra by Umm Qirfa and her daughter Salma was discussed. The possibility that they were religious leaders of some kind may now be explored. No mention is made in the text of the fate of Umm Qirfa's 11 remaining sons (one was killed on a raid on Medina some time previously), so it is not known whether they were alive, dead, joined the Muslims or whether they would have been eligible to lead the tribe in rebellion. Indeed, it is relevant to question why on the death of her husband Umm Qirfa was able to take control of the Fazara in the first place. It does not appear to be customary for a wife to take over leadership on the death of a husband, the only other example of it that has been noted in an Arabic context would be in the Roman accounts of Queen Zenobia, and this one instance taken from a foreign source which is in direct contradiction to another source may not be taken as indicative of anything. So, it may have been that Umm Qirfa and Salma were some sort of religious leaders, of a type unspecified though it may be speculated that they were *kāhināt*. This idea again suggests some interesting ideas about divine leadership resting in the hands of families, although a full exploration of this is outwith the scope of this study.

The great military example of a probable *kāhina* in action is that of Zarqa' al-Yamāmah. The three main references to Zarqa' in the sources are from al-Ṭabarī's

⁴⁵⁵ The idea of rain and deities will be noted in chapter five.

*Ta'riḫ al-Rusul wa'l-Mulūk*⁴⁵⁶, Yāqūt's *Muḥjam al-Buldān*⁴⁵⁷ and *Kitāb al-Aghānī*. The three versions are basically the same in their content, the al-Yāqūt account being the most detailed, *Kitāb al-Aghānī* the briefest. Her story begins in the area of Arabia which is now called al-Yamamah but was then known as Jaww and al-Qaryah. The area was inhabited by two tribes, the Ṭaṣm and the Jadis. The Ṭaṣm ruled over the Jadis under the leadership of a cruel tyrant who imposed numerous indignities on the Jadis, the worst of which was exercising the right of *prima nox*, that is, every virgin bride of the tribe had to be given to him before marriage. Eventually al-Aswad b. Ghifar of the Jadis roused his tribe to rebel against the tyrant and plotted against him. The plan was to invite them all to a party, but before they arrived the men were to conceal their swords in the sand and at a given time were to draw them out and slay the Ṭaṣm. The plan worked, but a man of the Ṭaṣm, Riyah b. Murrah, escaped and ran away to the Himyarite leader, Ḥasān b. Tubba'. He requested Hasan's help to which the leader agreed.

When the army was a third of the way to al-Yamamah, Riyah warned the Himyarites that he had a sister who was married into the Jadis, and that she had the most powerful eyesight of any one on earth and therefore she would see them coming and give them away⁴⁵⁸. In order to avoid this, he suggested that each man cut down a tree behind which he could hide as they advanced. They did as he said,

⁴⁵⁶ Al-Ṭabarī *Ta'riḫ* I p771-775 (vol.4 p151-154 translation by Perlmann).

⁴⁵⁷ Yāqūt, vol. 4 p1027-32, also a brief reference in vol.4 p 298 which is purely geographical and adds little to the actual story itself.

⁴⁵⁸ Another woman with exceptional eyesight is that of Hind bint Khouss. One day while out with a group of young women she saw a flock of *kata* (i.e. sandgrouse) pass by. Hind recited verse about the birds and accurately pronounced that there were a hundred birds (Perron p41). This may not demonstrate any kind of supernatural power- the girl may have indeed had exceptional eyesight and the story is no more relevant than that. However, she does recite verse, which may indicate something, but as the Perron anecdote is unreferenced and no original source has as yet been discovered of the tale, no comment can be made about the girl.

but Zarqa' had already seen them and she tried to warn the Jadis. She said to them that she saw Himyar on the march, but the Jadis could see nothing and they did not believe her. Thus when the Himyarites attacked, the Jadis were killed and their country devastated. Zarqa' was brought to Hassan who ordered that her eyes be gouged out and they found black veins in her eyes which she told them was antimony with which she used to colour her eyelids.

The events described above, based on the al-Ṭabarī text, differ little from those described in Kitāb al-Aghānī. The one major difference, is that in al-Ṭabarī's text, the sister of the man of the Ṭaṣm is never referred to as Zarqa', only as al-Yamāmah. The idea expressed in al-Ṭabarī and al-Yāqūṭ that the area was named after her and not that she was known by that name because it was where she came from appears to be the opposite to that which one would have expected, i.e. it is more likely for a person to be named after a place than a place for a person. Zarqa' is a name which suggests the great significance of her eyes, as she was called this on account of their piercing blue colour. It appears that her eyes are the key to the story. She is known to have had blue eyes, which it may be speculated was an unusual feature for women in South Arabia. However, the significance of antimony should be considered. In the al-Ṭabarī text, Zarqa' claimed to have used antimony to colour her eyelids. This use of kohl as eye make-up has a history into antiquity and is still used in modern times, as Lane noted with regard to 19th century Egyptian women that they believed kohl to be beneficial for their eyesight⁴⁵⁹

In the poetry included by al-Ṭabarī are the following lines;

⁴⁵⁹ Lane, *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* p45. The kohl used by the women of that time was made of the smoke-black produced by burning either cheap frankincense or almond shells, neither of which are of benefit to the wearer, though he claimed that some of the varieties used, especially those containing lead ore, had medicinal properties.

Be like her who when her visitor could not yet be seen, gave him from afar a frightened glance,
No woman with her vision arose to see the truth, like the truthful soothsayer in his rhymed prose⁴⁶⁰.

Al-Ṭabarī's comparison of Zarqa' with the truthful soothsayer may imply that that is indeed what she was. The notion that she could see the men approaching from such a great distance and disguised may also indicate that she was seeing things which others could not see not because of her exceptional eyesight but because she was a *kāhina*.

The story of Zarqa' is certainly legendary and as such cannot be taken as historical fact. The origin of the story is not known and cannot be dated, though it has been speculated that the device of the moving forest combined with the supernatural powers of the girl are reminiscent of the Sumerian King Gilgamesh and his march to the cedar-covered domain of Huwawa who could hear intruders at a great distance away⁴⁶¹. Obviously, while it seems unlikely that these events happened as described, what is important is that it was not seen as impossible by the recorders of history. That it was included in al-Ṭabarī and Yāqūt implies that they saw these events as plausible in the context of the time and place they occurred. This legend was not relegated to the supernatural tales of storytellers, it was written as the history of the Arab people, and thus however bizarre it seems, shows that people

⁴⁶⁰ Al-Ṭabarī *Ta'rikh* I p774 (vol.4 p153 translation by Perlmann). An almost identical rendering of this verse is also found in Ibn Hishām, vol.1 p70 (p34 in translation), where it is included in his account of the end of Persian rule in the region. The Guillaume translation of the line is, "No woman has ever seen, as she saw, the truth like the truth of al-Dhi'bi when he prophesied". In the notes to the Ibn Hishām recension, it is stated that it referred to a woman who was thought to be able to see things at a distance of three days journey. This would, although not explicitly stated in the text, seem to refer to Zarqa'. If it does not refer to her, then this is probably a literary device which shows that women with this sort of vision were part of the store of motifs used in such tales. It does not detract from the fact that people were prepared to believe it as factually accurate to some degree.

⁴⁶¹ 'Fables and Legends' p 378 in *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature*, vol.1.

believed that this woman could have done this and there is no hint in the text of disbelief in her existence.

A *kāhina* is said to have predicted the battles of Badr and Uḥud. This *kāhina* was from the Banū Sahm called al-Ghayṭala who one night was visited by her familiar spirit who is said to have chirped beneath her and uttered the following⁴⁶²:

I know what I know ,
The day of wounding and slaughter.

The Quraysh did not understand, and a further verse came:

Death, what is death?
In it bones are thrown here and there.

The Quraysh still did not understand, and decided to wait and see that happened.

When both battles took place in valleys the verses became clear.

Another example of a *kāhina* influencing her tribe during war is the *kāhina* of the tribe of Iyād⁴⁶³. The Iyād were attacked by the tribe of Naṣr and they captured a bride of the tribe of Ajam. The Iyād went with the Ajam across the Euphrates to pursue the Naṣr, and the Iyād's *kāhina* predicted that the battle would be won by them if a certain set of circumstances occurred, and they would "cover their necks with blood and cuts of the sword". The *kāhina* was correct and they won the battle.

Women went into battle in the service of the deity to protect the qubba in which the deity was housed⁴⁶⁴, and this may have been related to their role as

⁴⁶² Ibn Hishām vol. 1 p208 (p91-2 in translation). In Guillaume's notes to his translation, he states that the reading can vary here, the verb *anqaḍa* means the shriek of birds or the creaking of a door and can be applied to a man's voice, while the verb *inqaḍḍa* means the fall and swoop of a bird. Guillaume observed that in view of the muttering of soothsayers the former is a better reading. Given what is known about the oracles taken from bird flight which were prohibited by Muḥammad, it may be that either is equally appropriate.

⁴⁶³ Agh. 14/ 15. This *kāhina* is reported to have spoken in sajʿ.

⁴⁶⁴ The qubba was a tent-like structure in which the idols of the tribes of pagan Arabia were often kept. The qubba will be discussed in greater detail in chapter six.

kāhinat. The behaviour of the daughters of Find al-Zammanī is an example of women who appear to have existed in this role. Firstly, the sources called the two girls the two devils from the devils of men. The use of this expression may indicate that the girls were present as kāhināt, as the means by which a person became a kāhin was to have a familiar spirit or jinn from whom they received their information. Later, under Islam, it was felt that these were evil spirits, shaytans, and thus their work was the work of Satan⁴⁶⁵. Haldar suggests that there is no implication that these sisters belonged to any religious order⁴⁶⁶, however, the similarities between the verse recited by the second sister may imply otherwise and this will be discussed further in chapter six.

It thus appears that women had an important part in the religious life of Arabia. While references to specific religious intermediaries in the sources are few, it seems that women appear in this role in similar numbers to men. While obviously this is not a reliable indicator of the exact proportions of men and women intermediaries, it may be suggested that women were certainly not uncommon in these religious roles.

It has also been demonstrated that women were present in tribal conflict as a result of their status as religious functionaries. This aspect of their presence in battle will be discussed further in chapter six.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibn Hishām vol.1 p28 (p10 in translation). Here two rabbis inform the Tubba' that it is a shayṭān which inspires oracles, thus it seems that the term devil was used in descriptions of oracular communication.

⁴⁶⁶ Haldar p191.

Chapter Five.

The Cult of al-ʿUzzā.

Having examined the religious climate of the Arab world before Islam and the place of women within that, it is now time to give attention to one cult in particular, that of the goddess al-ʿUzzā. Ibn al-Kalbī described her as the great goddess of the Quraysh and thus she deserves to be discussed in some detail⁴⁶⁷. Scholarly work on the goddess has been limited, although she is by no means obscure by the standards of the period. She and her cult have been noted as important in various papers and books on the subject of pre-Islamic Arab religion. Having described al-ʿUzzā as a relatively well-known deity of the period, a caveat should be issued. While she is by comparison well documented in the sources which doubtless attests to her importance, there are still questions about her cult. While it is hoped to shed some light on the matter, due to the perennial problem of scanty and contradictory data both in primary and secondary sources, definitive answers cannot always be offered.

There was often a tendency in books and articles on the Arabian pagan deities and their worship to be rather accepting of information and providing relatively little analysis. While this is a useful presentation of material, it does mean that little work has been done on trying to establish if these facts are in any way accurate, or what their meaning was for the cult followers. The study of the religions of the period suffers too from the problems common in a great deal of

⁴⁶⁷ Ibn al-Kalbī p 18 (p16 in translation), Ibn Hishām vol. 1 p 83-4 (p38 in translation), Abū al-Feda claims that Hubal was the greatest idol of Quraysh although he does acknowledge that al-ʿUzzā was worshipped by them (p180).

work on pre-Islamic Arabia, notably in the earlier works, namely those of intellectual and spiritual ethnocentrism.

In the primary sources upon which work has been based, both Arabic and non-Arabic, al-ʿUzzā is not disregarded. In the non-Arab sources she is clearly identified in several texts, usually she is described quite unambiguously as Venus and is well-known to the classical historians as a goddess of the northern Arab lands. For information about the cult of al-ʿUzzā in the Hejaz one is dependant upon the Arabic sources.

Thus the aim of this chapter is to examine in some detail of al-ʿUzzā's cult as found in the vicinity of Mecca in the period immediately before Islam. Before embarking on a discussion of the cult as manifest in that area, there is a need to consider the history of the goddesses associated with Venus / Aphrodite, as al-ʿUzzā, as shall be demonstrated, was such a goddess. An examination of her cognate deities from the rest of the Semitic world will allow a fuller examination of the data available from the Arabic sources.

Although the focus of this chapter is al-ʿUzzā, her place as one of the three Banāt Allah means that the cults of two other goddesses of that triad, Manāt and Allāt, will also be briefly described. In this special reference will be made to Allāt because it would seem that of the two she was the one with the closer relationship to al-ʿUzzā. The link between these two goddesses will demonstrate one of the important facets of the goddess, that of a deity of war.

The Deities of the Morning Star.

It is a fact acknowledged amongst scholars of the religions of non-Islamic Arabia and the Near East that al-ʿUzzā was the Arabian Venus / Aphrodite and evidence to support this will be presented⁴⁶⁸. The goddess Venus / Aphrodite in all her incarnations in the Near East has had an association with the morning star.

The Babylonian goddess Istar, who herself was essentially a Semiticised version of the Sumerian Innana, can be seen as the forerunner of many deities in the ancient Near East and it appears that she was the first goddess to have been identified as Venus. Many of the deities of the ancient East have an element of her original form incorporated into their character.

Etymologically, the deities Istar, Astarte, Ashtart, Ashtoreth and Athar are all the same. The variations on this name mean that deities that are perhaps from the same mould are not derived from the common root, and therefore may avoid detection. Barton identified other deities as essentially being Istar⁴⁶⁹, though it seems that others may well also have been so, for example in Egypt there was Hathor⁴⁷⁰. It is a risk run by anyone attempting to navigate through the various deities of the east to start identifying all goddesses with Istar, something which is to be avoided as much as neglecting those which are indeed connected with her.

The cult of Istar spread throughout the mainland Near East and beyond. It is tempting to draw comparisons between certain Greek goddesses and Istar. This would not always be ill founded, as it is thought that the Greek deities were heavily influenced by the ancient civilisations to the east. This influence was returned when the Greeks began to colonise the eastern Mediterranean and strong Hellenistic

⁴⁶⁸ An example of a scholar who makes this statement is Ryckmans, *Les Religions Arabes Préislamiques* (1951) p15.

⁴⁶⁹ Barton, "The Semitic Istar Cult" *Hebraica* X (1893).

⁴⁷⁰ The evidence for this is presented in W. Maier, *Asherah, the Extrabiblical Evidence*.

influences can often be seen in the cults and rituals of the Semites and Egyptians, for example the dolphin worship of the Nabataeans ⁴⁷¹. Glueck wrote concerning this that

the irresistible Hellenism of their era affected all the forms of their self-expression and was modified by them in turn by their own enduring orientalism. Most of the gods and goddesses of their maturity seem to have been modelled completely after those of Greece, but closer examination reveals fundamental characteristics which are unquestionably Semitic ⁴⁷²

This influence may have spread into Arabia, as artefacts have been found in the Arabian desert which are of pottery styles more familiar from further north.

Intriguingly, statuettes have also been found showing dolphins, creatures which would not have normally been expected in the remains of a site in central Saudi Arabia⁴⁷³.

The deity associated with Venus did not have to be female, indeed in several Semitic civilisations of the ancient east the deity was male⁴⁷⁴. In South Arabia it is known that Venus was male, represented by the god 'Athar. He was believed by the south Arabians to influence rainfall and fertility, possibly deriving his name from the root *'thr* meaning to be rich or fertile⁴⁷⁵. Indeed, in inscriptions from the region, 'Athar is called the "lord of their water supply"⁴⁷⁶.

⁴⁷¹ N. Glueck *Deities and Dolphins* (1965) p243 and p359. The dolphin cult of Greece and Rome took hold in the Nabataean world as late as the second century C.E. and was particularly associated with Atargatis, i.e. Venus.

⁴⁷² Glueck p10.

⁴⁷³ Al- Ansāry, *Qaryat al-Fau*, p.25.

⁴⁷⁴ Fevrier, *La Religion des Palmyreniennes* p17.

⁴⁷⁵ Atharī means "well-watered land", and with reference to this Barton noted that there was a place name in Arabia, Tar'uz, meaning the land well watered by al-'Uzzā (*Hebraica* X p55).

⁴⁷⁶ CIS Pars IV no.47 quoted by Barton, *Hebraica* X p55. Barton observes that the deity was known by three epithets, the protector, lord of water and which he believes cannot be reconciled (p57). This may not be the case, as all three seem to be equally attributes of the Venus deities of the ancient east. 'Athar is also called *ba'l alam*, which Barton translated as lord of Alm (p55). The root for this is *b'l 'lm*, which is not linguistically distant from the expression meaning lord of the world and refers to God. While this may not be the case for a south Arabian deity, it is an interesting linguistic parallel.

The cult of al-ʿUzzā appears to have been widespread in the first few centuries CE. and she was worshipped in north Arabia by amongst others, the Nabataeans⁴⁷⁷. She was one of the chief deities of Petra, the famed city of that civilisation⁴⁷⁸, where she was worshipped along with the god Dusares, whom it is claimed was her son. The most important festival at Petra took place on the 25th of December on the same date as similar ceremonies in Elusa and Alexandria⁴⁷⁹. The festival was primarily one in honour of Dusares, whom the Greeks regarded as a version of their own Dionysius who was associated there with al-ʿUzzā⁴⁸⁰. The ceremony is said to have consisted of carrying the idol seven times round the temple accompanied by flutes, tambourines and the singing of hymns⁴⁸¹. Epiphanius described the Arab ceremony that took place at Petra. The ritual appears to have also taken place in the temple, and the focus in the Epiphanius description is the goddess rather than the god⁴⁸². Hymns were sung to her, in which she was referred to as the virgin, Kaabou, who gave birth to their god Dusares. It may be observed that the goddess was called Kaabou, which bears an resemblance to Kaʿba. The word Kaʿba is derived from the same root k-ʿ-b meaning to swell, specifically referring to breasts, but it should be noted that in the IInd form it means to render cubical. The link between the word for Kaʿba and the worship of a virgin deity may thus from a linguistic perspective have some foundation, which would be intriguing if it was proven that the goddess was worshipped at the Kaʿba.

⁴⁷⁷ Murray *Petra* p146.

⁴⁷⁸ Murray observed that the "syk" or pass which leads to the city there are carved niches in the walls which hold stones which are thought to represent the goddess (p38).

⁴⁷⁹ Murray p46. For a description of the festival at Elusa, see Jerome *Vita Hi Carionis* C25 as quoted by Barton, *Hebraica* X p61.

⁴⁸⁰ Murray p138.

⁴⁸¹ Murray, p146.

⁴⁸² Epiphanius *Panarion* LI, translated by Barton, *Hebraica* X p61.

It also appears that the ancient peoples of northern Arabia made human sacrifices to al-ʿUzzā. According to Procopius, al-Mundhir king of Hira sacrificed the son of his great rival, al-Ḥārith of Ghassan to the goddess⁴⁸³. A Syriac annalist also claims that the same king put four hundred captive nuns to death as offerings to al-ʿUzzā as well⁴⁸⁴. The Arabs of Sinai were also well known for their worship to al-ʿUzzā, “they knew no god either of spirit or made with hands, but worshipped the morning star”⁴⁸⁵ to which they would make sacrifices, usually camels⁴⁸⁶, but on occasion human. There was an example of this in the near escape from sacrifice of Theodolus, son of Nilus, to her by a tribe in Sinai⁴⁸⁷. In this regard, it may be noted that according to Porphyry, the “Doumatenoi” of Arabia would sacrifice a boy each year to the deity whom they would bury beneath the altar⁴⁸⁸.

It is known that the deities of the ancient Near East usually existed in relation to each other in organised pantheons. These pantheons could be quite complex, such as in Egypt or relatively simple, such as the well-known astral triads which occur with great regularity throughout near eastern religious systems. Many of these pantheons have been reconstructed from archaeological and textual remains so that their characteristics and attributes are well-known. These groups are often seen to have similarities with each other, and it has been possible for scholars to determine that certain deities are in essence the same as many others.

One of the features which has usually distinguished the deities of Arabia, with the exception of South Arabia, is that the deities usually existed independently

⁴⁸³ Lyall, p xxvii. Ryckmans, p10.

⁴⁸⁴ Lyall, p xxvii. Ryckmans p10.

⁴⁸⁵ Wellhausen, p37, also quoted in Robertson-Smith, *Kinship* p197.

⁴⁸⁶ Robertson-Smith, *Religion*, p166 and 281.

⁴⁸⁷ Fevrier, p18.

⁴⁸⁸ Porphyry *De Abstinencia* II 56, translated by Barton, *Hebraica* X p59.

of each other. It is believed that there is no evidence of any hierarchical or structured pantheon such as those of the neighbouring civilisations present in Arabia.

If Donner's analysis is basically correct and the peninsular Arabs borrowed high culture and intellectual products from their neighbours and had no original practices of their own, then it seems unlikely that they did not have pantheons of deities however loose they had become. The links between the people of the peninsula and the rest of the Semitic world have been seen to extend several centuries BCE and between this and the exchanges which may have taken place due to trade and social links between various groups, it seems unlikely that the Arabs of the desert and the trading towns of the peninsula were entirely untouched by this deity system, even if it is not as strongly developed or adhered to there as in the rest of the Semitic world.

There is little evidence of such pantheons in the Arabian peninsula. However, it seems that any such arrangement, though loose by comparison with the organised pantheons of the north appear to centre around deities associated with the planet Venus. The Morning Star is the planet Venus, and therefore the goddess Venus, and her cognate deities past and present, were associated with this celestial body. The planet Venus is unusual, as it appears both at sunrise and sunset, usually being the first visible body at both times. This is quite likely the explanation for the duality of the gods associated with the star. In Babylon, for example it was originally believed that Venus was two deities, one morning and one evening. A belief reminiscent of this is found in a Minaean inscription in which 'Athar is described as two deities in one, that is, the 'Athar of the rising and the 'Athar of the setting⁴⁸⁹.

⁴⁸⁹ Nicholson, p18.

In the case of al-ʿUzzā the most obvious evidence of associate goddesses is the Banāt Allah. They are referred to in the Qurʾān, firstly in the so-called Satanic Verses;

By the star when it ebbs your comrade comes not and is not deceived .
Have you thought of Allāt, al-ʿUzzā and Manāt, the third the other?
These are the exalted Numidian cranes whose intercession is approved⁴⁹⁰

This was an early Meccan revelation and is believed by Muslims to be the voice of Satan which Muḥammad heard whilst trying to induce a revelation rather than wait for Allah to speak to him.

To the non-Muslim, it could be interpreted as Muḥammad attempting to keep the polytheists on side for as long as possible by allowing them to continue to worship their goddesses, and indeed this is how the verse is seen by Bell and Lyall⁴⁹¹. Both also discuss how it appears to be of considerably earlier composition than the verses which follow dispelling the idea, and thus must have existed on their own as a means of making Muḥammad more acceptable to the Meccans. Both Bell and Lyall also noted that the peace which resulted from this compromise by Muḥammad allowed some of the exiles to return from Abyssinia⁴⁹². The other Qurʾānic reference to the Banāt Allah is in sūra 19;

Dreadful is the word that proceeds from their mouths when they say that the angels are Allah's daughters⁴⁹³

⁴⁹⁰ Sūra 53: 19-23.

⁴⁹¹ Bell, *A Commentary on the Qurʾān*, p 318 and Lyall, pxxix.

⁴⁹² *ibid.*

⁴⁹³ The sūra of the cave was revealed in Mecca. The circumstances of its revelation are given in Ibn Hishām vol.1 p302 (p137 in translation). In the same revelation, Muḥammad was also to warn those who assign to Allah a son, so it appears that this part of the sūra is concerned with attacking all those who claim Allah is part of a 'family', a concept which is seemingly in contradiction to strict monotheism. Muḥammad makes a similar attack on claiming that Allah has children in sūra 112, al-Tauḥīd, (the Unity) in which he states "He begetteth not nor was begotten" (112:3).

Ibn Hishām confirms that the Quraysh worshipped angels who were Allah's daughters, though it may be suspected that he knew this from the Qur'ān rather than any other evidence to support the statement⁴⁹⁴.

Muḥammad banned the worship of the three goddesses altogether in sura 10: 21-23 and refuted the notion that they were Allah's daughters;

What! Shall you have male progeny and Allah only female? That would be an unfair division! These goddesses are mere names which you and your forefathers have employed. Allah has sent down no authorisation of their worship

This verse abrogates the previous verses in which they were described as noble and their intercession permitted. Here Muḥammad nullifies the whole idea of the three goddesses having any power at all, thus reversing the earlier revelation.

The idea of the Banāt Allah is perhaps a very ancient one. Winnet claimed that the first reference to Allah and his three daughters was in a Lihyanite inscription. He does not name the daughters of Allah in this inscription, so it is presumed that they are not named, but he does observe that the goddesses Manāt, Allāt and al-ʿUzzā are the only three worshipped by the Lihyanites and therefore they must be the Banāt Allah. Thus he concluded that the group of Allah and the three goddesses as his daughters is as ancient as the 5th or 4th centuries BCE⁴⁹⁵.

However, Winnet does appreciate that this does not mean that the goddesses were created together as Allah's daughters, noting that they existed independently of each other and Allah. He concluded that Allāt originated in Syria, Manāt in Dedan and al-ʿUzzā in Sinai⁴⁹⁶.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibn Hishām vol. 1 p297 (p100 in translation).

⁴⁹⁵ Winnet, "The Daughters of Allah" *The Moslem World* 30 p118.

⁴⁹⁶ Winnet, p118.

The cults of Allāt and al-‘Uzzā do appear to have been much more widespread than that of Manāt. Manāt’s cult seems to have been centred on Mecca and Medina, especially among the Aus and the Khazraj. ‘Amr b. Jamuḥ a Medinan nobleman had a wooden idol called Manāt which was abused by the Muslims⁴⁹⁷. Ibn al-Kalbī has placed her at al-Mushallal in Qudayd , a place between Mecca and Medina where she was placed by the sea⁴⁹⁸.

Allāt was widely worshipped, appearing in references from Syria to South Arabia. In the Hejaz however, her worship seems to have been concentrated at al-Ṭā’if where she was worshipped as a block of white stone, the destruction of which is recorded in Ibn Hishām⁴⁹⁹. After the Muslim siege of the city had been successful, al-Mughirah b. Shu’bah mounted the idol with a pickaxe and struck it. The people of his tribe, the Banū Mu’attib who were of al-Ṭā’if, stood back afraid that they would be killed. When the idol was destroyed, Abū Sufyān took its ornamentation of gold and onyx away to pay debts. The women of Thāqif are of interest here as they came out with their heads uncovered to lament the loss of their idol;

Oh shed tears for the protector!
 Ignoble ones who have forsaken her,
 Those not competent in wielding swords⁵⁰⁰.

They lamented the loss of the goddess as if she were a living person, as it was noted earlier it was frequently the job of the women to eulogise the dead. Their verse demonstrates the usual disdain with which those charged with the protection of

⁴⁹⁷ Ibn Hishām vol.2 p452-3 (p207-8 in translation).

⁴⁹⁸ Ibn al-Kalbī p13 (p12 in translation).

⁴⁹⁹ Ibn Hishām vol.4 p541 (p616 in translation).

⁵⁰⁰ Ibn Hishām vol.4 p541, (p616 in translation), al-Ṭabarī *Ta’rīkh* I p1692 (vol.9 p46 translation by Poonawala). The al-Ṭabarī account corresponds almost exactly with the ibn Hishām recension.

themselves and their property would be held. No blame it seems was attached to the goddess for the defeat, even though she is described as the protector.

Attempting to distinguish between the goddesses in their late form, that is, how they are described in the Arab historians, is straightforward. Ibn al-Kalbī differentiates between them in a very methodical way, and shows no confusion in their characteristics. Al-Yāqūt wrote that Allāt and al-ʿUzzā can be easily distinguished from each other because Allāt was an idol belonging to the Thāqif and al-ʿUzzā was a thorn tree belonging to the Ghaṭafān, who built a temple for her⁵⁰¹. This account is quite accurate, Allāt was an idol situated at al-Ṭāʾif, and al-ʿUzzā was believed to reside in a thorn tree, and was said to be worshipped by the Ghaṭafān in other sources⁵⁰².

If Winnet is correct and the three goddesses were linked as early as the 5th or 4th century BCE then one must consider when the deities became worshipped in the Hejaz and whether they had an association with each other there. The goddesses are thought to be different ages and appear to have been worshipped in different parts of Arabia. Manāt appears to be the most indigenous to the region and is traditionally thought to be the oldest according to Ibn al-Kalbī⁵⁰³. His thought appears to be borne out by Winnet's epigraphical data.

Allāt and al-ʿUzzā are not thought to have originated anywhere near Mecca and Medina. There is evidence that they were worshipped in South Arabia before the third century CE during the Hamdanid period and the earliest references to them are from the first century CE from the time of Shahr Yādul Yuhargib king of

⁵⁰¹ Yāqūt III 664.

⁵⁰² Ibn al-Kalbī p16 (p14 in translation), here Allāt is identified with the Thāqif.

⁵⁰³ Ibn al-Kalbī p13 (p12 in translation).

Qataban⁵⁰⁴. Both deities were probably not indigenous to South Arabia as earlier references have been found to them in the north and therefore it has been suggested that they appeared in the south with the foundation of trading settlements of southern merchants in the north. Had they been indigenous some trace of their worship should have been found in earlier inscriptions.⁵⁰⁵

Both are also more recent than Manāt, Allāt seemingly the next in age and al-ʿUzzā as the youngest. This is the belief of ibn al-Kalbī who based his chronology amongst other things on theophoric names, noting that the Arabs named their children after Allāt and Manāt but rarely after al-ʿUzzā. He took this to mean that al-ʿUzzā was a relatively recent innovation and therefore few children were named for her⁵⁰⁶.

The extent to which the goddesses were associated with each other in the Hejaz specifically must be considered. Although the Qurʾān mentions the Banāt Allah and Winnet's inscriptions put them together, it seems as if they were not a true triad in the eyes of the Meccans. What appears to be more the case is that Allāt and al-ʿUzzā were often seen to be together but without Manāt. This seemingly forced union was remarked upon by Lammens though he made no attempt to explain it.

In sura fifty-three Allāt and al-ʿUzzā appear to be a pair, with Manāt attached almost as an afterthought, "Allāt and al-ʿUzzā and Manāt, the third, the other". It has been noted that traditionally the deities of Arabia were believed to be very individualistic, without the strong interactions that one expects to find in the myths and legends of other pantheons. Therefore, to try and group what would appear to be the three strongest goddesses together would be out of character if the deities

⁵⁰⁴ Winnet, p115.

⁵⁰⁵ Winnet, p115.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibn al-Kalbī p18 (p16 in translation).

did not associate with one another . It is a vague grouping, and the extent to which it was popularly followed by the adherents of the cults themselves is dubious. With the exception of the verse which ibn al-Kalbī claims to have been recited at the Ka'ba by the Quraysh during ṭawāf, they appear to have not existed as a triad in the time itself but rather have been forged into one by their description as such in the Qur'ān.

The original idea of the Banāt Allah may be one with its origins in a much earlier period, it is quite possible that this was a much later adoption in the Hejaz. As will be demonstrated below, the links between Allāt and al-ʿUzzā appear to be considerably stronger than those which bind either or both of them to Manāt. It may be that the three goddesses are all developments of the Istar goddess, but the three did seem to have their own identities, however similar they seem to be.

Allāt and al-ʿUzzā are the two deities whom it would be easiest to confuse with each other. This may well be because they are in fact facets of the same deity which developed closely, and it appears that both were worshipped in northern Arabia at around the same time. Both appear to have been known as Arabian versions of the morning star, though Allāt appears to also have had a lunar nature too⁵⁰⁷. It again might be noted that al-Yāqūt observed that it was easy to distinguish between Allāt and al-ʿUzzā. He did not mention Manāt.

Before continuing to discuss the possible associations of Allāt and al-ʿUzzā, it would perhaps be useful to briefly note some of the main features of Allāt's cult. As noted above, Allāt was worshipped at al-Ṭā'if, according to ibn al-Kalbī. It may have been the case that the one place where Allāt and al-ʿUzzā may be found together is at al-Ṭā'if . When Doughty visited the town on his travels in Arabia, he was shown

⁵⁰⁷ Lyall, p86.

three stones which were said to represent al-ʿUzzā, Hubal and Allāt. The description of the stone thought to be al-ʿUzzā has already been given, the stone of Hubal is said to have been a granite block, 5 or 6 feet long and cleft in the middle by the sword of ʿAlī, and the stone of Allāt was an 'unshapely crag' about the same length as that of al-ʿUzzā (i.e. about twenty feet) and slightly smaller in height and made of grey granite⁵⁰⁸. That these three deities were all found in al-Ṭāʾif suggests that firstly, ideas of Arabian idols existing only in their own shrines are seen to be false. Secondly that here again Allāt and al-ʿUzzā are together without Manāt, which again casts some doubt on the importance of the Banāt Allah.

Returning to Allāt, the association of this goddess with a celestial body seems much more confused than that of al-ʿUzzā, who seems on the whole to have been a stellar deity. Allāt is said by Ryckmans to have sometimes been a solar deity⁵⁰⁹, though he does say that Nielsen believes her to have been lunar⁵¹⁰, a claim he does not confirm with any textual reference. Ryckmans also noted that among the northern Arabians, she was Venus, though he also observes al-ʿUzzā's character was the same star⁵¹¹. Fevrier believes that in Palmyra, where Allāt appears to have been an important deity, she was Athene and was identified with the planet Venus⁵¹².

It may also be suggested that another indication of the association in the minds of the Arabs of this period between the goddesses is that Allāt and al-ʿUzzā were the deities by whom oaths were sworn. There are numerous textual references

⁵⁰⁸ Doughty vol. 2 p 549. It is also interesting to find the goddesses mentioned here with Hubal, who appears to have been a Meccan god whose cult did not extend beyond the Kaʿba.

⁵⁰⁹ Ryckmans, *Les Religions Arabes Préislamiques* p9.

⁵¹⁰ Ryckmans, p15.

⁵¹¹ Ryckmans, p15.

⁵¹² Fevrier, *La Religion des Palmyreniens* p16.

to this, all containing the same of formula of "By Allāt and al-ʿUzzā"⁵¹³. An early example of this is when the young Muḥammad was left behind by the Meccan caravan on the return journey from Syria, and a man of Quraysh swore by Allāt and al-ʿUzzā for forgetting him⁵¹⁴. In the same incident, when the monk Bahira was questioning Muḥammad before the caravan returned to fetch him, Bahira prefaced his questions with "by Allāt and al-ʿUzzā", upon which Muḥammad is said to have replied that he would not reply to a question in their name as they were hateful to Allah⁵¹⁵. Muḥammad of course prohibited the taking of oaths by anyone or anything other than Allah⁵¹⁶, but special provision was made for those who took oaths by Allāt and al-ʿUzzā;

Abū Huraira reported Allah's messenger (PBUH) as saying: He who takes an oath in the course of which he says ' By Lat (and al-ʿUzza) he should say: There is no god but Allah; and that if anyone says to his friend "Come and I will gamble with you" he should pay sadaqa⁵¹⁷.

The implication of this ḥadīth is that whoever swears by Allāt and al-ʿUzzā commits a grave offence which is equated with denial of belief in the oneness of Allah. This offence must be atoned for by the payment of ṣadāqa along with his repentance. The use of gambling as an illustration of the correct procedure in the event of such an offence may be due to the practice of dividing up sacrificial animals for different people of the tribe in the same way as a camel was portioned to play the game of maysīr. Both the oath taking and the gambling were indicative of pagan practice and thus likely to be disliked by Muḥammad.

⁵¹³ For example al-Waqidī, vol. I p32, 33, 80, 92, 105.

⁵¹⁴ Ibn Hishām vol. 1 p181 (p80 in translation).

⁵¹⁵ Ibn Hishām vol. 1 p182, (p80 in translation).

⁵¹⁶ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim Kitāb al-Aimān, chapter DCLV 4035, 4036, 4037, 4038, 4039, 4040.

⁵¹⁷ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim Kitāb al-Aimān chapter DCLVI 4041.

When Muḥammad began to preach against the goddesses, again it seems that Allāt and al-ʿUzzā were the focus of his attentions. Abū Lahab, the great advocate of the two deities, al-ʿUzzā perhaps in particular, said of Muḥammad, " This fellow wishes truly to get you to strip off Allāt and al-ʿUzzā from your necks"⁵¹⁸. Abū Lahab was also alleged to have gone to Hind bint ʿUtba protesting that he had done all he could to support the goddesses Allāt and al-ʿUzzā and remained faithful to their cult even when others had abandoned them⁵¹⁹. Zayd ibn ʿAmr ibn Nufayl, who renounced idolatry before the coming of Islam said the following words,

I have renounced both Allāt and al-ʿUzzā,
For thus would the brave and the robust do.
No more do I worship al-ʿUzzā and her two daughters,
Or visit the two idols of the banū Ghanm;
Nor do I journey to Hubal and adore it,
Although it was our lord when I was young⁵²⁰

This passage again refers to Allāt and al-ʿUzzā specifically. It also contains the intriguing expression " Al-ʿUzzā and her two daughters". Al-ʿUzzā is not said to have had daughters in any description of her cult. A possibility is that this was the model on which the idea of the Banāt Allah was based, and at some point the idea was appropriated and adapted into Allah having three daughters, whereas this may have referred to al-ʿUzzā as the supreme deity having Allāt and Manāt as her daughters. The other interesting reference here is to the two idols of the Banū Ghanm. The Banū Ghanm are known to have worshipped al-ʿUzzā. If Allāt and al-ʿUzzā were in some way tied together as companion deities then this reference would make sense.

From the Meccan side, there is an incident in which they try to reverse Muḥammad's conversion of one individual using the two goddesses. Bilāl, one of the

⁵¹⁸ Ibn Hishām vol.2 p442 (p207 in translation) .

⁵¹⁹ Ibn Hishām vol. 1 p351 (p159 in translation).

⁵²⁰ Ibn Hishām vol. 1 p226 (p100 in translation), Ibn al-Kalbī p22 (p19 in translation) , Agh.3 /15-16.

earliest converts to Islam, was taken by Umayya b. Khalāf in the hottest part of the day to a valley where he had a rock put on his chest. This was done to make him renounce Muḥammad and worship Allāt and al-ʿUzzā⁵²¹.

Even among the Quraysh for whom al-ʿUzzā was the most important deity, Allāt gets more than passing recognition. This is perhaps peculiar, as she was not traditionally associated with the Quraysh in the sources. Of course, the charge of religious capriciousness can be levelled at the Quraysh.

A similar statement may be made regarding al-Ṭāʾif and its inhabitants. Allāt was especially associated with the city and al-ʿUzzā was not, even though Doughty saw the remains of an idol alleged to be of her. On the capture of the city by the Muslim army, Kaʿb b. Mālik recited the following verse:

Until religion is established just and straight, and
Allāt and al-ʿUzzā and Wudd are forgotten
And we plunder them of their necklaces and earrings
For they had become established and confident⁵²²

This verse places Allāt and al-ʿUzzā together again, this time with Wudd. So here, there is an example of the two goddesses usually mentioned together with another non-related deity, in the same way as it may be suggested Manāt was. Why the third goddess was introduced appears to be a matter of artistic licence, as certainly she is not associated with them especially elsewhere. As well as the swearing of oaths, the other main occasion on which Allāt and al-ʿUzzā were listed together was at the

⁵²¹ Ibn Hishām vol. 1p317 (p144 in translation). The polytheists seemed to have treated those who refused to renounce Allah in favour of the two goddesses very badly. This is described in Ibn Hishām vol.1 p320 (p145 in translation).

⁵²² Ibn Hishām vol. 4 p480 (p588 in translation). This verse is also mentioned earlier in the text in vol.1 p78 (p36 in translation).

Battle of Uḥud⁵²³. The full significance of this will be discussed in the following chapter.

It appears that Allāt and al-ʿUzza were perhaps in some way companion deities⁵²⁴. Twin deities were not an uncommon feature among other Semitic belief systems. Although the discussion here is primarily about goddesses, it may be noted that on occasion deities based on Istar have male characteristics. It may have been that twin male and female deities may have become amalgamated and at some point the female deity may have absorbed the male characteristics of her companion. This may explain why she was from then on often depicted as having male attributes, for example in some of the carvings of the Western Semites the goddess had spears, swords and rode a horse. It has even been claimed that one stichus in the Ugaritic epic of Ba'al depicts Anat with sidewhiskers and a beard⁵²⁵. In Egypt the goddess Astarte was depicted as having masculine characteristics, up to a point where it was not explicitly clear whether the deity was male or female. Leclant observed on this point,

de façon générale ces documents ne permettant guère de préciser le sexe du personnage à cheval, qui apparaît cependant parfois comme nettement masculin. Ce dernier point ne constituerait d'ailleurs pas l'objection majeure, puisque le caractère sexuel d'Astarte peut présenter une certaine ambiguïté⁵²⁶.

⁵²³ Al-Ṭabarī *Ta'riḫ* I p1395 (vol.7 p114 translation by Watt and McDonald). The Watt and McDonald translation here contains a serious error. The expression *aqbl Abū Sufyān yaḥml Allāt wa al-ʿUzzā*, which clearly means "Abū Sufyān advanced carrying Allāt and al-ʿUzzā", was translated as "Abū Sufyān advanced, raising a cry of Allāt and al-ʿUzzā".

⁵²⁴ It may be noted that the Sabaeen civilisation of South Arabia had a deity called Azizulaḥ which is thought to be an amalgamation of the two goddesses (Fevrier p20).

⁵²⁵ De Moor proposed this reading, but Loewenstamm, who claimed that the terms used in the passage for sidewhiskers, and beard reputed it, claiming they could be better read as cheeks and chin. For this he claimed to have a stronger linguistic case. ("Did the Goddess Anat Wear Side-Whiskers and a Beard?", *Israel Oriental Studies* 4 1974).

⁵²⁶ Leclant *Syria* 1960 p7-8.

Sexual ambiguity was therefore a feature of certain depictions of deities in Egypt and therefore perhaps of Arab deities as they transferred into Egyptian culture as well as perhaps in their own milieu. This ambiguity may be as a result of the shared associations of the goddesses and gods or the inclusion of male characteristics following their merger with a god.

With regard to this feature in Arab deities, Teixidor observed that certain gods could be male or female,

the theologians of the city (Antioch) corroborated what Herodotus (3:8) and Origen (contra Celsum 5:37) much later had said about the Arab pantheon: that the Arab deities were basically two, a male one and a female one who was the deity of heaven . . . hence the astral character of the religion of Edessa embodied the late theological reflections of the ancient Arab cults of the desert by which deified planets Mercury and Venus were believed to be identical with the ancestral pair of male and female deities⁵²⁷

This ability of Arab deities to have an element of sexual duality was noticed by Rostovzeff when discussing Arṣu and ʿAzīzu / Azizos, the caravan gods of Palmyra. Arṣu and ʿAzīzu was a pair of deities which existed in Palmyra in around the first centuries CE⁵²⁸. They are the gods of the steppes, Arṣu on a camel⁵²⁹, ʿAzīzu on a horse⁵³⁰. The fact that Arṣu is depicted as a cameleer makes Teixidor think that he would have "an active and warlike role amongst the Arab tribes". This is perhaps correct, although the Arabs could and indeed did fight on horseback, indeed often in the poetry of pre-Islamic Arabia warriors would talk at great length about their horses. Both deities were acolytes of the sun, one represented the morning star, the other the evening star, as was also observed by Fevrier, "on s'accorde généralement

⁵²⁷ Teixidor, *The Pantheon of Palmyra* p69.

⁵²⁸ Rostovzeff, "Caravan gods of Palmyra" *Journal of Roman Studies* 22 (1922) , Fevrier, p27.

⁵²⁹ There are descriptions of Arṣu on a camel with a star in the background, Rostovzeff, *JRS* plate xxvii.

⁵³⁰ ʿAzīzu was often depicted with a horse, and interestingly, Rostovzeff noted that in an inscription from Palmyra he was known as the 'mother of horses', and interesting epithet for a male deity (p31).

à voir dans le couple Azizos-Monimos un doublement d'une divinité, correspondante à la planète Vénus, représenté à la fois étoile du matin et comme étoile du soir"⁵³¹. Rostovzeff believed that Arṣu was probably originally a female deity⁵³² and was of Arab origin⁵³³, a fact agreed upon by Teixidor to the extent that the name may have been Arab, but he also states that by phonetic analogy Arṣu was Ares. However, Teixidor also states elsewhere in the book that Azizu was Ares. This would be illogical unless he had made the assumption that the two deities were one in the same, a fact he does not clearly state even if the connection had been made.

Cooke noted using archaeological data that at Edessa Ares and Hermes made a pair and were identified with the Semitic Azizos and Monimos, the strong and the benevolent. In Latin inscriptions, Aziz is Deus puer phosphoros, so it is argued that he was an evening star and his companion was a morning star⁵³⁴. Arṣu and 'Azīzu were depicted on a Palmyrene terracotta together with Venus⁵³⁵. This too would seem to indicate that there are great similarities between this twinning of male deities which appears to have occurred in northern Arabia and the twinning of female deities in the same area. Both seem to have much in common with the possible twin deities of Allāt and al-'Uzzā if they were twin facets of Venus. Cooke also noted that in a Palmyrene inscription, Arṣu and 'Azīzu are 'the good and the rewarding gods', and Cooke claims that they are the Arabian Uzza and Ruda⁵³⁶. Winnet, on the other hand, observed that in Safaitic inscriptions found to the south east of Damascus, Allāt is mentioned together with Ruda. He therefore concluded

⁵³¹ Février, p17.

⁵³² Rostovzeff p112. Dussaud wrote that he had seen Arṣu depicted as a nude female on a charger with a star (Février p31).

⁵³³ Rostovzeff p110.

⁵³⁴ Cooke, *The Religion of Ancient Palestine in the Light of Archaeology*, p178.

⁵³⁵ Rostovzeff plate xviii.

⁵³⁶ Cooke, p178.

that Ruda (or Rudaw as he also refers to the goddess) was the Thamudic and Safaitic equivalent of al-ʿUzzā⁵³⁷. Therefore Cooke and Winnet appear to be in direct opposition in their findings, though as both are based on inscriptions both must contain some degree of truth. If nothing else, this lack of consensus demonstrates that the deities of the ancient Near East were flexible to the point of being interchangeable, and also further illustrates the affinity of Allāt and al-ʿUzzā and that both were able to exist in a pairing with a perceived form of the other.

The deity Azizos raises some interesting questions regarding al-ʿUzzā. It may even be suggested that they were the same deity, given that both were morning star deities and both have essentially the same name. As suggested by Fevrier, "dans une grande partie du monde Arabe, Azizos était supplanté par la déesse Al-'Uzza, dont le nom la Forte représente la forme féminine d'Azizos"⁵³⁸. Teixidor stated that Azizos was derived from the root ʿzz meaning strong or mighty, and it is known that al-ʿUzzā is derived from the same root in Arabic. Although the name of the Palmyrene deity has only been seen in translation the coincidence seems too strong to ignore.

It may be speculated that al-ʿUzzā was in fact a later, feminine version of Azizos. Having said that, there is evidence that her cult was extant as a goddess elsewhere in the Near East at the same time as Azizos existed in Palmyra. This may not nullify the theory entirely.

What may be of interest here in considering the cults of Allāt and al-ʿUzzā is that they could be an Arabian variant of the northern cult of the caravan deities Arsu and Azizu. Scholars appear to think that Arsu was at some point female and Arabian, and it seems reasonably certain that al-ʿUzzā and Azizu are in essence the same

⁵³⁷ Winnet p123.

⁵³⁸ Fevrier p19.

deity. The potential for this theory will really only be expanded in the next chapter when the gods and goddesses are more fully discussed in their relation to war. This may go some way to explaining why Allāt and al-‘Uzzā appear without Manat in many Arab oaths.

Another set of divine twins, both female, is also possibly relevant to a discussion of the link between Allāt and al-‘Uzzā. They are the twin fortune goddesses identified by Cumont in his explorations of Syrian archaeological sites in the early part of this century. He discovered two terracottas both of which are now in the Louvre depicting two female figures whom he named 'La double fortune des Semites'. The first terracotta showed a left facing camel, covered from neck to tail with a large basket on top of which were posed two female statues, exactly alike . Their hair was in long curls falling on each shoulder with a medallion on their foreheads surmounted by a crown on top of their heads with a veil attached. Near the head of the camel there was a portion of a tent and what appears to be a semi-circular piece of cloth ⁵³⁹. In the second terracotta, which Cumont believes to depict the same two figures, they are sitting in an enclosed object. They appear to have been richly dressed , which, in conjunction with the style of their crowns, suggested to Cumont similarities with depictions of Tyche. Beginning at the head of the camel there was a semi-circular tent-like structure. The statues had their left hands raised with the palms open, interpreted as a sign of protection or benediction, their right hands were resting on the edge of the tent ⁵⁴⁰.

⁵³⁹ Cumont, *Etudes Syriennes* p263-4.

⁵⁴⁰ Cumont, p265.

These two figurines show therefore two female figures, which may have represented the deities themselves, statues of the deities or living persons assuming the identity of the deity for a ceremonial purpose.

Two theories of the origin of Allāt and al-ʿUzzā have been described. The first theory proposed that they were both Istars, Allat being the older of the two by an unknown length of time. Possibly Allāt was present in Mecca before al-ʿUzzā, indeed it could be that Allāt was pushed aside in favour of one of her own epithets. Alternatively, Allāt and al-ʿUzzā are female versions of Palmyran caravan gods and this is why they were often invoked together.

There is no straightforward answer to the question of which is correct. In fact, it is possible that both are. The evidence for both having some element of truth is strong enough to suggest that in some way they must both be right. The mechanism for how this happened is unknown. As will be shown in the next chapter, the idea that the goddesses are inextricably linked with each other will become even clearer, and thus the ability of the deities to stand alone in Arabia except when being sworn by in oath is intriguing.

Al-ʿUzzā in the Arabic Sources.

Before considering the cult of al-ʿUzzā in Mecca and its environs, the icons and characteristics of the Venus /Aphrodite cults will be considered as they appear in association with the Arab al-ʿUzzā.

The Dove. The dove was a symbol of Aphrodite /Venus not only in Greece where they were kept in temples in her honour, but also in the ancient Near East⁵⁴¹ where

⁵⁴¹ Cooke p29. ERE s.v. Aphrodite.

they were described as the delight of Aphrodite ⁵⁴². The inviolate nature of the doves was, it seems, an ancient belief. At the time of the visit of the Tubba' to Mecca it appears that the doves of the Ka'ba were already sacred, as were the wild birds of Mount Thābir ⁵⁴³. It seems that the sacredness of the doves predates some of the other taboos of the Ka'ba which legend has it were introduced by the Tubba' on this visit ⁵⁴⁴.

When the Jurhumites lost control of the Ka'ba it is said that there was much sadness, and verse recited on the event contains the following lines;

Tears flow, weeping for a town wherein is a sure sanctuary and the sacred places,
Weeping for a temple whose doves are unharmed
Dwell safely there with flocks of sparrows,
Wild creatures there are tame, unharried,
But leaving its sanctuary are hunted freely⁵⁴⁵

Again, this verse demonstrates the sacred nature of the dove, and also states the sacred status of animals found within the ḥaram. The poetry specifically states wild animals, which could mean that animals that lived there as symbols of the deities were unharmed but could be hunted if they left, in some sort of ritual hunt. This possibility will be discussed further at a later point.

At a later point chronologically, when 'Abd al-Muṭṭālib was ordered to dig the well of Zamzam, he was ordered to do so in verse;

⁵⁴² This was said by an attendant of Astarte of Eryx, quoted in Barton, *Hebraica* X p49.

⁵⁴³ Ibn Hishām vol.1 p127 (p9 in translation). It is ambiguous according to Guillaume, whether the animals referred to were wild birds or wild goats. In either case a sacred nature is not inexplicable, as horned animals were sacred to several deities.

⁵⁴⁴ According to the text, he ordered the Jurhumites concerning keeping the Ka'ba clean from blood, dead bodies and menstuous cloths. These taboos as later introductions by a man who it was known was under the influence of rabbonim may give interesting suggestions as to the origins of these taboos, as well as what they may indicate about early forms of worship at the sanctuary.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibn Hishām vol.1 p115-6 (p48 in translation).

It will never fail or run dry, it will give water to the pilgrims
It lies between the dung and the bloody flesh,
By the nest where the white winged ravens fly,
By the nest where the ants to and fro play⁵⁴⁶.

It is possible that the white ravens referred to are in fact the doves of the Ka'ba. This verse also implies that blood sacrifices were still made at the Ka'ba at this time.

At the conquest of Mecca a wooden dove was found in the Ka'ba, which may also place al-'Uzzā in the shrine itself along with the living doves⁵⁴⁷.

Another possible suggestion of the link between the birds of the Ka'ba and the goddess is found in the account given of the shrine to al-'Uzzā set up by the Ghaṭafān in Nakhla, described by Zaid b. Asad as follows,

I shall establish for you a *hadda* of your present religion by the sanctity and inviolability of which you can move up to where the birds would perch and wherever your destination lies⁵⁴⁸.

An interesting observation to the above piece of text by Abbas is that a *hadda* can refer to a loud voice or a voice from heaven⁵⁴⁹. He queried whether this has any relation to the Ibn al-Kalbī statement "and he built over it a Buss from which the voice was heard"⁵⁵⁰. It may be interesting to point out that in the Faris translation of the Ibn al-Kalbī text, he actually translates this passage as the place "in which the people used to receive oracular communications", so he obviously thought that this was what it meant.

Again from the Muslim era comes the following anecdote from Ansāb al-Ashrāf of an exchange between Ibn al-Zubayr and 'Ibn Idah:

⁵⁴⁶ Ibn Hishām vol. 1 p145 (p62 in translation).

⁵⁴⁷ Ibn Hishām vol.4 p411-2 (p552 in translation).

⁵⁴⁸ 'Abbas, "Two Hitherto Unpublished Texts on Pre-Islamic Religion" *Actes du 8^{me} Congrès de l'Union Européenne d'Arabes et Islamisants* (1976) p13.

⁵⁴⁹ Abbas p13.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibn al-Kalbī p18 (p16 in translation).

I am but a pigeon among the other pigeons of the mosque. Can you find it in yourself to kill a pigeon? "Soldier" said, Ibn Idah, "fetch me my bow and arrows". The soldier fetched them and ibn Idah pulled out an arrow, centred it on his bow, took aim at a mosque pigeon and said, "Pigeon, does Yazīd drink wine? Say yes and I swear to Allah I will kill you. Pigeon, do you refuse allegiance to Yazīd the commander of the Faithful and abandon the community taking refuge in the sanctuary so that your life may be spared? Say yes and I swear to Allah I'll kill you." "Woe to you ibn Idah" said ibn al-Zubayr, "Do birds speak?" "No", answered Ibn Idah. "But you do and I swear to Allah that you will either pay allegiance willingly or unwillingly or you will be killed. If we are ordered to kill you and you take refuge in the Ka'ba we will destroy it or burn it down on your head". Ibn al-Zubayr said "You would violate the sanctuary and the Ka'ba?" "He violates it who commits unbelief therein" replied Ibn Idah.⁵⁵¹

The challenge to kill a pigeon of the mosque was evidently seen as a great test of loyalty by Ibn al-Zubayr. He assumed that Ibn Idah would not be able to do it, as the doves were considered special. The fact that Ibn Idah was willing to destroy the sanctuary because a refugee therein did not ally himself to caliph Yazīd is a sign of his zealotry. The reference to the birds speaking is interesting here, as it seems that if the birds ever were a symbol of an oracle, then they were never thought to speak themselves, or that this idea had been forgotten.

The fact that doves live and have always lived in the vicinity of the haram in Mecca is well known, and they have retained their sacred nature until the modern era. When Richard Burton made his pilgrimage there the expression "as inviolable as the doves of the haram"⁵⁵² was still in use, and he also described the feeding of the birds,

before nightfall the boy Muḥammad rode to feed the mosque pigeons, for whom he had a pocketful of barley. He went to the place where the birds flock — the line of pavement leading from the isolated arch to the eastern cloisters. During the day women and children are to be seen sitting there, with small piles of grain laid upon little plaited trays of basketwork. For each they demand a copper piece, and religious pilgrims consider it their duty to provide the reverend blue-rocks with a plentiful meal⁵⁵³.

⁵⁵¹ al-Balādhurī *Ansāb al-Ashraf*, quoted in Khalidi p60.

⁵⁵² See also Arafat, p13. Arafat sees this as an expression of the haram as a sanctuary rather than an indication of a deity, though he also notes the wooden dove found there on the conquest of Mecca.

⁵⁵³ Burton, p175. Burton gives some information about the dove, or pigeon as he refers to it, and how it is regarded in modern times. He noted that the bird had been given a veneer of Islamisation, in which the bird is seen talking to the Prophet. The birds are in some areas

The Snake.

The cult of the serpent exists in many forms, whether of a single serpent or of a species, of a serpent embodying a spirit or god, of a real or imaginary serpent represented in an image as associated with the divinity (a chief god or one of many) or of a purely mythical reptile⁵⁵⁴.

This quote sums up the breadth and popularity of the snake in world religions. The snake has been a symbol in the Near Eastern religions for millennia, and has migrated into Western traditions through the infamous snake in the Garden of Eden and other Biblical snakes. If these references have given the snake a rather negative image in the west, in the east they often were quite positive creatures and symbolic of life, although usually in the sense of rebirth rather than life itself.

Thus, the snake was associated with life, death, resurrection and fertility, also water and illness. Life in all things depends on fertility and attempts to secure the fertility of the land were just as commonplace in early eastern ritual as the fertility of man. The snake as a symbol of fertility goes back to the earliest Mesopotamian myths⁵⁵⁵.

known as Allah's Proclaimers which he takes to mean that they were associated with the Ark, though perhaps given some of the rituals of oracles commonly found with the deities of the ancient world it may be that the idea of the birds giving forth the word of the deity may have ancient origins other than those suggested by Burton. He also noted that the birds had become divine symbols in India, where they were attached to the shrines of Sakhi Sarwar and Shakir Padshah in Khotan. Interestingly, he observed that the Hindu Pandits claim Shiva and his wife had lived in Mecca in the form of pigeons. This may be particularly interesting in the light of a later point in this work where the twinning of deities is discussed.

⁵⁵⁴ ERE p8 "Serpent worship" by J.A. McCulloch.

⁵⁵⁵ The familiar tale of the Garden of Eden is found in the epic of Gilgamesh, in which Aruru formed Enkidu from dust, then made the animals and then made woman. Man and woman lived in harmony until the serpent came along and tempted them to eat the forbidden fruit. As a result of their action 'Adam and Eve' discovered their nakedness, which Barton believes means they discovered their sexuality as a result of the snake's intervention, thus human fertility was born (Barton, *Semitic and Hamitic Origins* p 142) Also the god Ea was represented by a snake and was known as the god of the river of the great snake, referring to the Euphrates, the source of agricultural life, and in the myths of the fertile crescent the serpent was a symbol of power and strength.

From Eve onwards, women and snakes were linked in myth. Reinach proposed that further to the myth that snakebites brought on menstruation, the origin of menstruation was linked to the shedding of blood and defloration with the snake and the phallus⁵⁵⁶.

One of the earliest goddesses with a snake association is from the Minoan civilisation and can be traced back as far as the middle of the fourth millennium BCE. At Knossos she is shown with three snakes coiled around her in a similar way to the snake goddess of Eileithyia of Gournia in the east of Crete⁵⁵⁷. Arthur Evans believed that these snakes were the "visible impersonations of the spirits of the household", and E.O.James wrote that the goddess was an earth mother in the dual role of fertility deity and mistress of the nether regions⁵⁵⁸.

No artefacts bearing snakes have been discovered as yet in Arabia and thus one might conclude that it was not a feature of goddess worship in the region. However, there are two pieces of evidence which may suggest that there was something present in the beliefs of the people with regard to the snake and also the Ka'ba.

At the time of Muḥammad it appears that snakes were objects of superstition. As superstitions may be based on folk belief based in early religious thought, one might suggest that in these ideas there is a trace of some unstated belief, or perhaps that some belief was still present but not explicitly expressed by the texts. It appears that the snake could be a vehicle for spirits of either good or evil natures. The spirit contained in the body of the creature may be an infidel or a believer, and rules were

⁵⁵⁶ ERE p411 Serpent worship.

⁵⁵⁷ During excavations of houses in Knossos, Kumasa and Prinia tubular vessels were found which had two pairs of cups attached to them and decorated with ringed or grass snakes on the sides. Along with these vessels were found tripod tables with representations of snakes on them drinking from a central well (James, *The Cult of the Mother Goddess* p130).

⁵⁵⁸ James p130.

given about the killing of snakes. Short-tailed or striped snakes could be killed as it was thought that they could cause blindness in those who saw them⁵⁵⁹. An anecdote from the *sīra* tells of a woman referred to only as Zinnira, who was struck blind, Quraysh immediately said her sight must have been stolen by Allāt and al-‘Uzzā⁵⁶⁰. Perhaps this does give an allusion to the idea that the snake was the familiar of the goddesses.

It was forbidden to kill snakes that lived in houses. Ibn ‘Umar used to kill all types of snake until Abū Lubada b. ‘Abd al-Mundhir Badrī reported that Muḥammad had forbidden the killing of house snakes and so he abstained from it. The individual was allowed to ask the snake to leave three times. If the snake did not go it was assumed to be an infidel and could then be killed⁵⁶¹.

This tradition would appear to show that the attitude towards snakes was not entirely consistent. The fact that at first Muḥammad had prohibited the killing of snakes may show that they held some position of importance that would require them to be treated with respect. ‘Umar b. al- Khaṭṭāb, who was to become the second caliph, was described as killing them freely, which, if they were sacred creatures in the eyes of the pagan Meccans, would probably enthrall him even more to kill them. The ruling that a snake had to be asked to leave three times to leave before it could be harmed also shows an increasing degree of leniency in the no killing rule, possibly in response to a change in circumstances allowing a harder line in the rule. What is also interesting here is that snakes that lived in houses were specifically singled out initially for protection. This appears perhaps reminiscent of

⁵⁵⁹ Mishkat Al Masabeh CMXXXV 5543.

⁵⁶⁰ Ibn Hishām, vol.1 p318(p144 in translation). Zinnira herself said that the goddesses had the power to neither help nor harm and only Allah could do such a thing.

⁵⁶¹ Mishkat al-Masabeh CMXXXV 5543, see also 5544, 5545, 5550, 5551.

the Mediterranean beliefs which in Greece took the form of the snake as a guardian of the house, and they were kept there either as living creatures or in statue form⁵⁶². There is nothing to suggest that these idols were of serpents or any representation of a serpent deity, though it may have been the case.

In addition to the laws given by Muḥammad, the other noteworthy mention of a serpent in the sources with regard to Mecca is the snake which lived in the well in the centre of the Ka'ba into which votive offerings were thrown. The people were afraid of it would not go near it as it would rear up at them with its mouth open. Every day it would lie on top of the Ka'ba, and one day when it was there a bird was sent by Allah to come and take it away⁵⁶³.

The Gazelle. In the ancient east horned animals were often associated with deities. The horns were the obvious focus of the symbolism here, implying strength and potency in the case of male deities, such as the ram of Tammuz, but that they were the same shape as the crescent moon may well have been important in their initial adoption as symbols of divine power. The moon was deified in ancient times and thus animals that bore its symbol were believed to have some link with the deity.

The gazelle was used as a sacrificial offering amongst the Semites, who, it appears, considered them to be special sacrifices. Robertson —Smith noted that "no kind of wild quadruped was an ordinary animal sacrifice among the Semites . . . in certain rituals we find the stag or gazelle as an exceptional sacrifice"⁵⁶⁴. He also gives an example of a northern Semitic practice that is of particular interest here. The goddess Tyche was worshipped in Laodicea on the Phoenician coast, and here

⁵⁶² ERE p404. A similar situation appears to have been the case in Egypt.

⁵⁶³ Ibn Hishām vol. 1 p193 (p84 in translation). Al-Ṭabarī *Ta'rikh* I p1135 (vol. iv p56 translation Watt and McDonald).

⁵⁶⁴ Robertson-Smith, *Religion* p202.

they made an annual stag sacrifice⁵⁶⁵. The people believed that the goddess was a virgin immolated when the city was built and attained holy status, which appears to be of a similar nature to the Canaanite child sacrifices, in which a child was buried in the walls of new buildings or thrown into fiery pits. Robertson-Smith speculated that at some point in time the Phoenician sacrifice may have included a person who was sacrificed acting in the role of goddess. If he were correct, then to substitute the human for an animal, it would be logical to use an animal, which was commonly associated with the divine, in this case they appear to have adopted the stag.⁵⁶⁶ This speculated use of a person instead of the goddess may demonstrate that the priestess or another suitable person was able to act in the stead of the deity in certain roles or was believed on occasion to assume the spirit of the deity in a type of ecstatic possession.

The gazelle was a sacred animal to the South Arabians who associated it with the worship of 'Athar, the Sabaen male Venus. This may extend to other groups, for example the Banū Harith would hold seven days of mourning upon finding one dead⁵⁶⁷.

It appears too that in Mecca the gazelle was a creature of some veneration. It is alleged that herds of sacred gazelles were kept in the vicinity of the Ka'ba into the modern period⁵⁶⁸. Going back in time to the earlier sources, there is a wealth of

⁵⁶⁵ Robertson-Smith, *Religion* p390 also Additional Note G, p447.

⁵⁶⁶ Robertson-Smith *Religion*, p447. He says of himself that he was tempted to view the opening of David's lament on Saul as an allusion to such a sacrifice, "The Gazelle, O Israel, is slain on thy high places" — 2 Sam. I: 19. The fact that the stag was used by the Phoenicians instead of a gazelle may not indicate that anything is incorrect in the theory of associating the goddess particularly with the gazelle. The use of this animal is entirely in line with the use of a horned animal generally, though in this case, the stag, it must be said, is close to the gazelle. In fact, it may have been a male gazelle, or, as is equally likely, the source from which Robertson-Smith got this information could have been mistranslated, or alternatively, the observer or reporter of the ritual assumed that the horns indicated a male animal and it was in fact all along a female gazelle or species of deer/antelope.

⁵⁶⁷ Robertson-Smith *Kinship* p195, based on Ibn Moghawir.

⁵⁶⁸ Wellhausen p102.

evidence to suggest that the gazelle was of some importance in polytheistic Mecca, and this centred on the Ka'ba itself. When 'Abd al-Muṭṭālib was ordered to dig the well of Zamzam, he found treasures in it which he presented to the sanctuary, and these treasures included two golden gazelles⁵⁶⁹. When tribesmen came to Mecca to consult the oracle at the shrine, they would give jewels to the shrine, but would also make offerings of swords to the gazelles. Ḥasan b. Thābit wrote that when Zamzam was dug the other treasures found included swords and this seems to confirm the textual claim of their being made offerings to the gazelles⁵⁷⁰. Offerings were made to the gazelles specifically thus it may be suggested that they were votive images of the goddess, and as there were two gazelles it may suggest dual deities.

When the Jurhumites were forced out of Mecca, they allegedly buried the gazelles, along with the corner stone of the Ka'ba into the well⁵⁷¹, an act which led Serjeant to speculate that there were offerings made there which were far older than the shrine which is there today⁵⁷². This is a strong possibility, as it would be sensible when under attack to bury the holy relics in a safe place to avoid their plunder with a hope of later restoration.

Trees. Trees have long been part of the myth of the Near East, sometimes symbolising life itself. From the texts and cylinders of the Babylonians trees are given sacred symbolism. The tree was prominent in the Bible. From the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden onwards, the tree makes numerous and important

⁵⁶⁹ Ibn Hishām vol.1 p146 (p64 in translation).

⁵⁷⁰ The Diwān of Ḥasan b. Thābit, quoted in Serjeant *South Arabian Hunt*, p88. Hasan actually refers to them as *ghazāl al-Ka'ba*, which removes any doubt that they were not intimately associated with the shrine. Had they not been attached to each other then they would have been unlikely to bear such a title.

⁵⁷¹ Ibn Hishām vol. 1 p146 (p64 in translation). Ibn Hishām also notes that chain mail was found there.

⁵⁷² Serjeant, *South Arabian Hunt* p88.

appearances. Abraham was ordered to build his altar to God at Mamre in Genesis 13:18, the angel spoke to Gideon under an oak at Ophrah in Judges 6:11, and Deborah the nurse of Rebecca was buried under an oak at Bethel in Genesis 35:8.

The prophet Hosea also confirms that trees were sites of religious gathering and worship describing the burning of offerings there and also that in the shade of trees "your daughters turn to prostitution and your daughters-in-law to adultery"⁵⁷³ which may imply that trees were at that time sites of fertility rituals.

The palm tree seems to be of particular importance in the Middle East⁵⁷⁴. The ability of the palm to flourish in harsh conditions would have been noticed. From the palm the ancient Semite could acquire almost all his needs, food and water from the fruit (from which alcohol could also be made) and the foliage could be used for a variety of other purposes⁵⁷⁵. Often at an oasis the palm would be the only plant growing naturally there and thus was seen perhaps as a sign of the generosity of the deity, as the Israelites did when they stopped at Elim after the Exodus and saw the seventy palm trees and twelve wells. The continued importance of the palm in the Bible is evident from its appearance in the description of the Beit Hamikdash in Jerusalem which was decorated with palm trees and cherubim. The tribes of Judah and Benjamin had in their hands a place called Baal-Tamar, meaning lord of the palm.

Deborah, the prophetess and leader of the Israelites against the Canaanites, was said to receive her visions while seated under a palm tree " she held court under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim and

⁵⁷³ Hosea 4:13.

⁵⁷⁴ It was also the Egyptian tree of Paradise (Barton, *Semitic and Hamitic Origins* p127).

⁵⁷⁵ Barton noted that before the cultivation of grain the date was the most important agricultural crop produced in the east (Barton, *Semitic and Hamitic Origins* p138).

the Israelites used to come to her to have their disputes decided"⁵⁷⁶. A similar oracle was at Shechem where there was a tree of the soothsayers⁵⁷⁷, which Robertson-Smith believed it to be a Canaanite oracle⁵⁷⁸.

Thus trees in the Bible were sites of religious activity, and this was also the case in Arabia. Before Christianity came to Najran with Faymiyun and Salih the people, "following the religion of the Arabs", worshipped a great palm tree and on one day of each year they would hang clothes and women's jewels from it and would process round it⁵⁷⁹. The holy tree of Dhat Anwāt was a huge green tree which was worshipped by the Quraysh and other Aḡab tribes. It was visited every year by these tribes⁵⁸⁰. It was so beloved of the Quraysh and others that when the Muslim army was on the way to Ḥunayn they saw a tree and Muḥammad to give it to them as a sacred tree in the place of Dhāt Anwāt.⁵⁸¹

In fact, it appears that this tradition is one that survived into the last century amongst superstitious Arabs who considered the tree a source of miraculous power and healing. Doughty described such trees, the *menāhil*, and their use. The ritual consisted of the sick individual making a sacrifice to the tree, sprinkling it with the blood, cooking the flesh, some of which was eaten by the tribesmen and some was hung on the tree⁵⁸². He also gave the example of the menahil of Jan, a bush and an oak, which were "behanged with old beads, votive shreds of calico, lappets of

⁵⁷⁶ Judges 4:5.

⁵⁷⁷ Judges 9:37.

⁵⁷⁸ Robertson-Smith *Religion* p179.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibn Hisham vol. 1 p32 (p15 in translation). In Guillaume's notes to the translation, he said the word for to process round could also mean to devote the day to, but as ṭawāf was a religious devotion, it may be that the two meanings are synonymous and no distinction need be made.

⁵⁸⁰ Al- Azraqī, vol.1 p82, citing al-Wāqidī, Osiander "Die Religion der vorislamischen Araber" *ZDMG* (1853), p481.

⁵⁸¹ Arafat, p11.

⁵⁸² Doughty, *Travels* vol.I p449. They believed that spirits lived in trees, vol.I p305.

coloured stuffs and other vile baggages"⁵⁸³. That this tradition remained until the Victorian era suggests something of the strength of belief that the people had in it as it survived Islam in a form which appears to be virtually unchanged.

The Qur'ān too pays attention to the tree, for example in sura 53:14-18;

By the lote tree of the utmost boundary,
Nigh unto which is the Garden of Abode,
When that which shrouds did enshroud the lote tree?
The eye turned not aside nor yet was overbold,
Verily he saw one of the greater revelations of his lord.

This extract is of some interest as it refers to Muḥammad's ascent to heaven and so here again is a link between the tree and the divine. The shrouding of the lote tree seems to be reminiscent of the burning bush of Moses⁵⁸⁴.

The tree is praised in sura 23:19-20,

Then we produce for you gardens of date palms and grapes,
Wherein there is much fruit for you to eat,
And a tree springs from Mount Sinai that grows oil and relish for the eaters

⁵⁸³ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁴ The burning bush was a sign to Moses from God and in the Qur'ān the lote tree was one of the greater revelations. Bearing in mind that the Arabic word for sign and revelation is the same it would appear that the meaning for both Muḥammad and Moses was the same. Further to this, when the text from Exodus is read other features showing similarities in holy places and in the experiences of Moses and Muḥammad become clear. In Exodus, it is written that the angel of God appeared to Moses within a bush, which though on fire did not burn. When God saw that he had gone over to look, he ordered him to remove his sandals as the place he was approaching was holy ground (Exodus 3; 2-5). On seeing the burning bush neither Moses nor Muḥammad turned away in fear, but realised it for the miracle that it was. In addition to this, it will be noticed that God ordered Moses to remove his sandals on holy ground. In the haram at Mecca in pre-Islamic times it was customary to remove the sandals and throw them into an area of the haram. It was said that it was in the haram that Moses fell asleep before the mi'raj and if the vision of the tree took place either there or on har habeit in Jerusalem then either would constitute a holy place just like the site of the biblical bush. It may have been intentional on the part of Muḥammad to try and echo as closely the experience of Moses to validate his claims to prophethood, and also it may demonstrate further the Semitic ideas common to both. In the east fiery apparitions were not uncommon. Robertson-Smith noted the annual feast at Epheca where the goddess would appear as a fiery meteor that descended from the mountain into the water. According to Africanus and Eustathius the tree at Mamre similarly went on fire and did not burn at festivals, though this was dismissed as an optical illusion.

This verse also shows that at the time of this revelation the vine was not viewed unfavourably as the giver of wine, nor the date palm for giving the means to produce alcohol.

The idea that trees were places of prophecy and judgement (which at this point in time could often be performed by the same people) has been shown by the Biblical examples. In the life of Muḥammad too comes the incident when he sat under a tree and a monk declared that none but prophets had ever sat under that tree⁵⁸⁵.

Fertility.

One of the features of Istar worship which has attracted a great deal of scholarly attention is the aspect of fertility. As stated above, the name of the South Arabian deity is derived from the root meaning to be fertile. This aspect of the deity is one which goes back far into antiquity. It has been an issue often overemphasised by scholars who at times seemed determined to demonstrate this practice was virtually universal. This "veritable obsession" of turning every goddess into a fertility deity and every ritual into a fertility rite has been remarked upon by Day⁵⁸⁶. While it does appear that there is a disproportionate interest in this one area, Day appears to go too far in the other direction, almost denying that it ever existed at all. Neither is perhaps entirely correct. Rituals of some kind would accompany any belief in divine intervention to ensure fertility.

The ritual aspect of the fertility cult that appears to have attracted most attention is the rather inappropriately named ritual prostitution. It can be said to be inappropriate because the term is very loaded, and carries cultural implications that

⁵⁸⁵ Ibn Hishām vol.1 p188 (p82 in translation).

⁵⁸⁶ Day, "Anat, Ugarit's Mistress of Animals", *JNES* 51 (1992) p181.

are unhelpful in determining the nature of what was really going on. The use of the term prostitution may in a sense be accurate, but at the same time it does conjure up images of orgiastic unregulated and immoral activity which in the context of the cults of the east it was not.

The practice was seen to guarantee the fertility of the land and all living things. Among the Mesopotamians and early Semites it appears that "in order to ensure such divine unions and so insure the fertility upon which the life of the tribe depended, human sexual relations were indulged in so that, by sympathetic magic, the gods might be induced to do the same"⁵⁸⁷. The classical sources contain descriptions of such rituals, a typical account coming from Herodotus⁵⁸⁸,

There is one custom amongst these people which is wholly shameful: every woman who is a native of the country must once in her life go and sit in the temple of Aphrodite and there give herself to a strange man. Many of the rich women who go there are too proud to mix with the rest, drive to temple in covered carriages with a whole host of servants following behind, and there wait; most, however, sit in the precinct of the temple with a band of plaited string round their heads- and a great crowd they are, what with some sitting there, others arriving, others going away - and through them all gangways are marked off running in every direction for the men to pass along and make their choice. Once a woman has taken her seat she is not allowed to go home until a man has thrown a silver coin in her lap and taken her outside to lie with her. As he throws the coin he has to say 'In the name of the goddess Mylitta' - that being the Assyrian name for Aphrodite. The value of the coin is of no consequence; once thrown it becomes sacred, and the law forbids that it should ever be refused. The woman has no privilege of choice - she must go with the first man who throws her the money. When she has lain with him, her duty to the goddess is discharged and she may go home, after which it will be impossible to seduce her by any offer, however large. Tall, handsome women manage to get home again, but the ugly ones stay a long time before they can fulfil the condition which the law demands of them, indeed as much as three to four years⁵⁸⁹.

⁵⁸⁷ Barton, *Semitic and Hamitic Origins* p112.

⁵⁸⁸ Herodotus was born in c. 484 BCE in Halicarnassus, and died in Thuria sometime shortly after completing his history c. 430 BCE. He was a classical Greek historian, sometimes known as the father of history (Introduction to Herodotus *The Histories*). In reading this account by Herodotus, it may be noted that he had no great love of the Persians, as Greece and Persia were historical enemies, and may be biased against the Persians in giving account of their history, but it has been observed that Herodotus took some of his anecdotes from Persian oral traditions ("Exit Atossa: Images of Women in Greek Historiography on Persia", Sancisi- Weerdenburg, in *Images of Women in Antiquity*, p28) .

⁵⁸⁹ Herodotus, p121-2.

The account given by Herodotus may not be entirely accurate. Although he does claim to have witnessed certain aspects of Persian custom for himself, this is not one of them. Certain aspects of the story would appear to show too that Herodotus may have not had first-hand knowledge as he suggests that women ended up staying in the temple for years waiting to fulfil this vow. This would appear to be artistic exaggeration or perhaps confusing a permanent female temple servant with the other women who made a single visit. However, certain aspects of his story appear familiar from other examples of such a practice. The twisted cords round the head appear in an extract from Maimonides which is given below, and also the practice of going outside the temple precincts to lie together recalls the story surrounding the Arabian idols Isāf and Nā'ila. It should be noted that this extract is of interest here as Mylitta was the Assyrian name for Aphrodite, and therefore a forerunner of al-'Uzzā.

While Herodotus was probably basing his account on second-hand information, which may have not been contemporary with his writing, it may be assumed that he faithfully reported what he was told and therefore while some circumspection may be applied in the interpretation of the practice, it may be that something resembling that which he described did take place⁵⁹⁰.

An interesting account from Ephraem Syrus is as follows;

The waning moon with Venus they set in the streets as an adulteress. They name a pair of women among the planets but they are not names. The names which are not separate are names of women full of lust. But as to those whose women belonged to all, how could there be among them any chastity?

⁵⁹⁰ Herodotus was believed to always exactly retell that which his sources had told him. In this he is assumed to be meticulous. However, this led him into trouble, as his sources could mislead him and he told tales which were inaccurate. This led to his being criticised by some of his contemporaries, Thucydides for example, called him a 'liar'. Herodotus did not lie, but his rather trusting style of collecting historical material has meant that the more accurate has to be sifted from the less to a great extent. However, as he did report everything he was told, the inaccurate material can give as much valuable information about his sources and the attitudes of people at the time as the more accurate material gives reliable information about what actually may have happened or been the case. Thus in some respects Herodotus may be more in the mould of a story teller than a historian.

And how could there be among them any rectitude, who do not regulate marriage as the birds do?

And he continues,

The dwellings of the Hebrews and the tents of the House of Hagar declare that will is ordinance and law. Where the wild feasts and the tinkling bells and the dice playing and the public bidding of the Chaldeans? Who did away with the feast of the raging idol, on whose festal day women prostituted themselves? Did then some star rise on those virgins that forthwith they vowed their virginity to prostitution?⁵⁹¹

The first of these extracts is of interest as it explicitly states that the ritual was connected to the worship of Venus. It also says that the ritual took place when the planet was waning, which demonstrates that the ritual was not one which happened at any time but was specifically related to the movements of the planet and thus must have been subject to some degree of regulation.

The second extract mentions that the practice did not occur among the Hebrews and the tents of Hagar. By this one may assume he means the Jewish population in the area and also to some section of the Arab community⁵⁹². It may be that the Arabs who did not participate in this were Bedouin. This is not unlikely, perhaps the Bedouin, as part of their traditional disdain of settled life, regarded the perhaps more urban practice as not part of their lifestyle. It is uncertain exactly who he may have meant by this. Therefore one can assume that at the time of writing or at some point prior to it, the Jews had ceased to participate in any such ritual. Despite the strongly monotheistic and stringent laws regarding sexual matters, the ancient Hebrews are known from Biblical texts to have lapsed into following the cults of the neighbouring civilisations⁵⁹³. Syrus refers to the practice being

⁵⁹¹ Ephraem Syrus vol II p458/9 from Barton *Hebraica* 10 p59.

⁵⁹² In contradiction to this, Isaac of Antioch stated that the "sons of Hagar" would offer their women to the star goddess (Barton, *Hebraica* X, p61).

⁵⁹³ The later prophets appear to have had a constant battle to try and keep the people from falling into idolatry. Ezekiel said that he saw a woman sitting at the north gate to the temple in the service of Tammuz (8:14), as Jeremiah also preached against the celebration

Chaldean. Therefore the author must have had some knowledge that the ritual was used in Mesopotamia, as he uses the ancient name for that region.

If rainfall was a goal of the rituals, then Maimonides⁵⁹⁴ provides a similar example of a rain ritual as follows:

10 virgins dressed with diadems and red garments should dance, push each other, moving backwards and forwards to make the sign of the sun; the result of this long process was believed to be (by the idolaters) to be a downpour of rain

and he continues to describe who the women would try to prevent hail lying on their backs with their feet spread and lifted up, said certain words and did certain things whilst in this disgraceful position⁵⁹⁵.

Two of the notable features here are that the women wore red, a colour often appearing in dealing with divinity⁵⁹⁶, and also they wore diadems, which may be an echo of the Mesopotamian wearing of crowns of cord described by Herodotus. Maimonides wrote that these rituals were related to bringing rain. In Arabia the rain periods were linked to the stars, such as in Hind's poetry after the battle of Badr in which she mentions the rain bringing stars:

All generous men in years of drought
When the stars withheld their rain⁵⁹⁷

The term *naw'* was used to define these stars, though the term seems more related to the rising and the setting of the star and is generally defined as the dawn setting of a star in the west at the same time as an opposite star rises in the east.

of the Tammuz festival at the temple in 561 BCE, and he also frequently mentions worship of the Queen of Heaven, an epithet of Astarte (44:17).

⁵⁹⁴ Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, known as Maimonides or the Rambam, was born in 1135 in Cordoba, Spain and was the son of a dayan. He left Spain at the fall of Cordoba in 1148, ending up in Fustat after stays in Fez and the Holy Land. As well as a philosopher, halakhist and commentator he was a respected doctor. *The Guide for the Perplexed*, from which this extract is taken, was written for his pupil Joseph b. Shamin and was completed by 1190. Maimonides died in 1204.

⁵⁹⁵ Maimonides, p333.

⁵⁹⁶ This will be discussed in chapter six.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibn Hishām vol.3 p39 (p358-9 in translation)

Muḥammad, in sura 53:19-23 condemned the practice of asking stars to bring rain rather than asking Allah. Al-Zamakhshārī suggested that *naw'* was related to the goddess Manāt who was worshipped by certain tribes for rain⁵⁹⁸. Varisco's interpretation of these facts as "the meaning of *naw'* had more to do with the occurrence of rain than the setting (or rising) of a star per se"⁵⁹⁹ would appear to be true, given that the meaning of *naw'* is unclear, other than it has relevance to the coming of rains and is in some way connected to the movement of stars. From the perspective of astral worship among the Arabs and their belief that certain stars may embody the power of the fertility deity, it becomes clearer how this may have been connected. The *naw'* was about the movement of stars, as they were believed to bring the rain. All of this appears to be in agreement with Maimonides description of the stars bringing the rain, and it may be that the Arab deities whom it was believed had the power to bring rain would have had some kind of ritual associated with them to achieve this.

With regard to any hints in the Qur'ān that the stars were thought have an association with fertility, one must turn to sura al-Ṭāriq. While there is no specific mention of the star being the source of fertility for man, it is interesting to note the juxtaposition between the opening lines on the greatness of the star, followed immediately by a discussion of fertility;

Let man consider from which he is made
 Made from a gushing fluid
 Which issues from between the loins and the ribs

It does not appear that these āyāt were revealed at different times, it seems that the entire sūra was early Meccan and there is no suggestion in any commentary that the

⁵⁹⁸ H. Gatje, *The Qur'an and Its Exegesis* p142.

⁵⁹⁹ Varisco, "Rain Periods of Pre-Islamic Arabia", p253.

sūra was a composition of different parts. It may be purely coincidental that the sūra discussing the morning star discusses human fertility, but equally it may not. This sūra implies that stars may have been thought at that time to have had some influence on the fertility of the land if not the people themselves. Muḥammad did however, in spite of the seeming acceptance of the idea of a fertility star in Sūra al-Ṭāriq, instituted a ban on the belief in rain-bringing stars⁶⁰⁰.

If there was any belief amongst the Arab peoples generally, not necessarily amongst the people of Mecca, that rain was brought by stars, and that these stars were in turn representative of goddesses, then this may partially explain a piece of Arab folklore noted by Albright⁶⁰¹. There is a figure of Arabian tradition, which it appears may have existed into the modern era, called Umm al-Gheith, the mother of rain. The term, according to Albright, was applied to a doll in the form of a woman who is dressed up and carried in a procession with appropriate songs. He believed that this practice was developed out of the prayers offered to the Virgin Mary, though he does acknowledge that the pagan rain prayers would have gone to Atargatis.

The relevance of this discussion to Arabia is that there is some debate as to whether a fertility cult ever existed in Mecca or the surrounding area. It is not impossible that there was, given the similar natures of Arab and other Semitic religions. It may be assumed that if there was an explicit textual reference to a fertility cult in Mecca, then it would have been found by previous scholars. Therefore if there is any trace left in the sources, it will be extremely oblique, and thus an attempt to reconstruct such a cult must be of the most speculative nature.

⁶⁰⁰ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim vol. iv Kitāb as-Salama chapter CMXXXI p 1206.

⁶⁰¹ Albright, "Islam and the Religions of the Ancient Orient" *JAOS* (1940) p290/1.

It may be that if there was a cult with a fertility it was connected to the idols Isāf and Nā'ila. They were said to be a man and a woman of the Jurhum tribe. On the pilgrimage at Mecca, they took advantage of the peace of the haram and committed 'adultery' there. Allah was so outraged at the violation of his shrine that he turned them both into stones, which were then set up as idols by the people who continued to make sacrifices to them until Islam⁶⁰².

This story is not to be historically accurate. The first thing that strikes the reader is that they were turned to stone by the deity. It is peculiar that the deity would turn the two criminals into stone so that the people would use them as idols. The counter argument to this would be that they had been turned to stone to act as a warning, but the people were so wicked that they used them instead as objects of veneration. However, the first thought is more likely to be correct, and that there were never two individuals turned to stone. What seems to be the case is that they were two anthropomorphic idols, a fact which may suggest they were not local, as the Arabs of the peninsula appear to have largely stuck to the earlier Semitic practice of having blocks of stone as their idols.

The second feature of the story is the claim that they committed adultery, that is *zina*, unlawful intercourse. It may be that the Muslim legend conceals the fact that there was some aspect of a cult there which took the form of ritualised intercourse. This is perhaps indicated by the sin for which they were turned to stones. Peters speculated that the idols were a "distant echo of ritual prostitution"⁶⁰³ either at the Ka'ba or nearby.

⁶⁰² Ibn al-Kalbī p9 (p8), Ibn Hishām vol.1 p82-3 (p37 in translation). Al-Azraqī vol1 p74 and 78 citing Ibn Ishāq and vol.1 p77 citing al-Wāqidī and vol.1 p267 citing Ibn Jurayj. The Jurhum tribe had control over the Ka'ba after Ismail as he married a woman of that tribe. The haram stayed in their hands until it fell into the hands of the Khuza'a who lost it to Quraysh.

⁶⁰³ Peters, *Hajj* p19.

If quantity of references are an indicator of importance, the frequency of reports concerning the idols Isāf and Nā'ila shows that they must clearly have been central to the worship at the Ka'ba⁶⁰⁴. The story of the idols appears to be remarkably uniform in its basic format, the only embellishments being greater detail over where they were or the names of the two people involved.

If there was a cult of fertility centred on Mecca, it may be that it was in some way related to the sacred month of Rajab and the ritual of the *ʿumra*. The rituals of the *ʿumra*, which was primarily a Meccan festival, included the *ṭawāf* and the sevenfold running between Safa' and Marwa'. The month of Rajab was a holy month to the Meccans, celebrated in the seventh month of the year and fell in spring.

Rajab was a month of great importance. When the Muslims instituted a ban on its observance there was uproar and eventually the month was re-instated as a result of public pressure. The Islamic clerical debate about the Rajab celebrations appears to have been fierce and contradictory. The issue is discussed in great detail by M.J. Kister and may be summarised as follows⁶⁰⁵; certain religious authorities claim that Muḥammad prohibited the rituals of the sacred month and said that the fires of hell burned with the people who observed Rajab. On the other hand, it was said by some authorities that Rajab was a holy month, the month of God.

Whatever the clerical injunctions, it is clear that the festival remained dear to the people of not only Mecca but the Arab world. As would be expected of any festival of pre-Islamic origin, it has been given a veneer of Islam to make it

⁶⁰⁴ Ibn Hishām vol. 1 p82-3 (p37 in translation), Kitāb al-Munammaq p405, Al-Azraqi vol. 1 p74,p75, p77,p267 vol.2 p5-6 Al-Wāqidī vol.1 p18, 134, vol.2 p493 vol.3 p795, p832,p970, Ibn al-Kalbī p 29 (p9 in translation) . These are the main sources on the idols, there must be many others, and this does not include the possible secondary sources dealing with the idols.

⁶⁰⁵ MJ Kister "Rajab is the Month of God" *Israel Oriental Studies* 1 (1971).

acceptable. It appears to have been the custom in pre-Islamic times that Rajab was the month in which the ʿumra was performed and also the sacrifice of the ʿatīra was made. The comparisons which can be made with Passover centre around this sacrifice. Both festivals were held in spring at the time of the birth of the animals, and as such was the time for the sacrificing of the first-born. The ʿatīra sacrifice was precisely that - the sacrifice of the firstborn animal. Robertson-Smith noted that in the Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī the ʿatīra was included in the Kitāb al-ʿAqīqa, the chapter dealing with the ʿaqīqa sacrifice after the birth of a child. He states that the traditionalists make little distinction between the fara' and the ʿatīra⁶⁰⁶.

One of the rituals of the month, to which there is only one textual reference, is perhaps what may indicate that there was a link with ideas of fertility and ensured the welfare of the people. In the eighth volume of Ibn Saʿd, it is described how, in the month of Rajab, the women of Quraysh would gather together and sit in the Kaʿba and worship the idol⁶⁰⁷. This practice is one which continued into the sixth century, given that one of the participants in the ritual described by Ibn Saʿd was the Prophet's wife Khadija. No reason is given for the ritual, nor is the practice expanded upon in the text. It could be that this was the Meccan version of the fertility rites described in such colourful detail by the classical historians. A curious reference which may suggest this is found in the Hamasa where it is stated that the Arabs were careful to have sexual intercourse only outside the ḥaram area⁶⁰⁸. This is of interest partly because of the statues of Isāf and Nāʾila which have been discussed. This may confirm that their petrification was indeed because of fornication within the Kaʿba itself which would have run contrary to accepted practice. This still would not

⁶⁰⁶ Robertson-Smith, *Religion*, p210 footnote.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibn Saʿd, vol.8 p17.

⁶⁰⁸ Hamasa p599, noted in Robertson-Smith *Religion* p436.

answer why they were turned into idols however, though it may demonstrate some consciousness in the mind of the narrator of what was and was not acceptable behaviour in the ḥarām. This is reminiscent of the observation made by Herodotus which is contained in the extract quoted previously, in which it is stated that once the woman had been selected, she and the man would go outside the temple before having intercourse.

One other point of interest is with regard to Muḥammad himself. It is claimed by one source that Muḥammad was conceived on the first day of Rajab⁶⁰⁹.

It seems that there was a remnant of this cult which resulted in this period being considered an auspicious time for marriage. Again, this must be rather speculative, but it would appear to answer some questions. The example from the life of Muḥammad concerning the events around his parents marriage seem to make little sense if the cult was one based on the sympathetic magic which one sees in other Semitic cults. However, that the woman who approached ʿAbd Allah did so in a proposal of marriage, and was quite vehement that she would not enter into any illicit arrangements might imply that that she was looking for a legal agreement. In addition to this, the text states that she had converted to Judaism. If this was the case, though we know that at times the Jews did slip into idolatry and fertility cults, this does not mean that they would capriciously follow any cult in the vicinity. However, there is documentary evidence that Qurayshi men and Jewish women did marry each other and thus for her to offer herself in marriage would be a possibility⁶¹⁰.

⁶⁰⁹ Kister, "Rajab is the Month of God" p197.

⁶¹⁰ Michael Lecker, "Marriage Links between Qurayshi Men and Jewish Women", *JSAI* 10 (1987).

If it was, then the question of to which deity were these rituals consecrated needs to be asked. It is known that the fertility rituals of the northern goddesses were often centred around the goddess Venus in one of her many forms. If it was the case that al-‘Uzzā was found in the Ka‘ba, either with or without another goddess, it may be that rituals were in her honour. It should be noted that Ibn Sa‘d specifically states that it was the women of Quraysh who performed this ritual, which may add extra weight to the belief that rituals would be to their special deity.

It is also known that the Ka‘ba was the place to which young marriageable girls were taken. Al-Fākihī noted the custom of young girls being dressed up in the best clothes and jewels they could afford and would take her to the Ka‘ba where she would make the ṭawāf and the people could look at her and ask about her. He claims that the purpose of this was to attract someone to marry her if she was free or to buy her if a slave. The girl would then be taken home and kept there until she was taken to her husband. This practice is described by al-Fākihī as one of those of the 'old times', but Kister claims that this report is corroborated by the story of ‘Ā’isha dressing up a maiden and leading her in ṭawāf remarking 'We may perhaps succeed in hunting a youth of Quraysh'⁶¹¹. This story seems to show that the Ka‘ba was a place at which it was not only appropriate but customary for marriages to be agreed. However, it is stated elsewhere that the actual arrangements of the marriage were made at the Dār al-Nadwa or house of meeting⁶¹².

⁶¹¹ Kister, "On Concessions and Conduct, A Study in Early Ḥadīth", in *Society and Religion from Jāhiliyya to Islam* (1990) p 25.

⁶¹² The Dār al-Nadwa was a building which stood near to the Ka‘ba and was an important meeting place for the tribe of Quraysh. It was here that they stored their war banners and to which the caravans returned and from which they departed, and it was also where the meetings of the community leaders were held along with councils of war, all marriages were arranged there and the women were secluded there when they first began to menstruate. Traditionally the Dār al-Nadwa was thought to be the house of Qusayy, and argument which Hartmann takes to try and show that the building was a kind of religious

Al-ʿUzzā in the Arabic Sources- the Shrine at Nakhla.

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, al-ʿUzzā was the greatest idol of Quraysh⁶¹³. The goddess's name itself means the great or the mighty. She was however much more widely worshipped than just by the Quraysh, being a goddess of particular veneration for the Banū Kināna, Mudar and Ghaṭafān.⁶¹⁴

The shrine of al-ʿUzzā was in Nakhla, a valley of palm trees outside Mecca⁶¹⁵. Nakhla is famous in the sources as the site of the controversial attack on the Meccan caravan in the sacred month of Rajab⁶¹⁶. There are actually two Nakhlas, a north (al-Shamīyya) and a south (al-Yamanīyya), with the meeting point between the two being known as Baṭn Murr. According to Ibn al-Kalbī the idol was situated in the

centre and that he was an ancestor god who was the symbolic father of the tribe (Hartmann, "Qusajj" *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 1912) It seems perhaps unlikely that Qusayy never existed at all, although how closely he resembles the stories told about him is as open to question as the life stories of any of the ancestors of Muḥammad. Whatever the original significance of the Dār al-Nadwa, it was the building around which daily life in Mecca seemed to centre perhaps even to a greater extent than the Ka'ba. The two buildings must surely have been connected to each other in some way, possibly what is here is a similar juxtaposition of important buildings in the same pattern as the ancient Israelite tent of meeting (which is indeed exactly what Dār al-nawda means in Arabic) held to the Tabernacle. The Tabernacle was the dwelling place of the deity, but it was the tent of meeting to which people went when they had a question to ask or to discuss important matters. What is also interesting about the Dār al-Nadwa is that it was here that the councils of war were held and the *līwa'* or war banners were kept. It may be that this is a similar practice to that found latterly among the Rwala Bedouin of keeping the *ʿuṭfah* in the tent of the chief (see below for a fuller discussion of the *ʿuṭfah*). Returning to the seclusion of the young women at the Dār whilst waiting to receive their *dir*, this seems to be linked to the marriage of the girls which would also be arranged at the Dār al-Nadwa. It may have been the case that the girls were taken there and then taken to make the *ṭawāf* and then returned to the Dār to have their marriage arranged.

⁶¹³ Ibn al-Kalbī p18 (p16 in translation). Yāqūt also wrote that she was the greatest idol of the Quraysh whom they would worship, look to for guidance and give sacrifices (vol. 1 p16).

⁶¹⁴ Yāqūt III p664 Ibn Ishāq also noted that she was venerated by the Kināna as well as the Quraysh, (vol.1 p83-4 p38 in translation). It may be significant that the Banū Kinana and the Quraysh were related tribes and allies.

⁶¹⁵ Yāqūt III p664, Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb al-Muḥabbar* p324, Ibn al-Kalbī *Kitāb al-ʿAṣnām* p25 (p16 in translation).

⁶¹⁶ Ibn Hishām vol. 2 p601-6 (p286-8 in translation).

northern Nakhla, specifically in a valley called Ḥurāḍ which lay next to al-Jumair to the right of the road to Iraq above Dhat-ʿIrq nine miles from Bustan. He defines this further to a ravine called Suqām in the valley of Ḥurāḍ which he claimed Quraysh dedicated to her⁶¹⁷.

The shrine was established by either Zalīm b. Asad or the Quraysh. As stated above the ravine of Suqām was dedicated to her by Quraysh but Ibn al-Kalbī also states that it was Zalim b. Asad who originally introduced al-ʿUzzā⁶¹⁸. Both of these traditions may be correct, as Abbas wrote, "if the second is complimentary to the first, then the ḥarām was established at a later date when the change of circumstances necessitated such a procedure"⁶¹⁹. Al-Azraqī claims that she was put in Nakhla by ʿAmr b. Luʿayy and that the shrine was incorporated into Qurayshi pilgrimage rites⁶²⁰. ʿAmr b. Luʿayy is generally blamed for the introduction of idols to Mecca and in some ways it is suspicious if he is named as having anything to do with such a move. However, it may be that when Quraysh dedicated the ravine to al-ʿUzzā it was ʿAmr who did this. It seems possible that Zalīm b. Asad originally moved her there. The reason for believing this to be more likely is partly that the idea that the Quraysh would be unlikely to initiate the removal of an idol from their money-making shrine in Mecca and moving it outside the area under their direct control, and also the version of events given by ʿAbbas in his translation suggests that her initial location was in Mecca, something for which there is some evidence. The later Qurayshi adoption of Nakhla into their places of worship was possibly due to their devotion to the goddess and a desire to keep her shrines as sacred places, and

⁶¹⁷ Ibn al-Kalbī, p18 (p17 in translation).

⁶¹⁸ Ibn al-Kalbī p17 (p16 in translation).

⁶¹⁹ Abbas, p8.

⁶²⁰ Al-Azraqī i. 74.

perhaps also because her cult had been to some extent superseded in Mecca. So, while the location of the shrine seems to be clear, the person responsible for it being established is not.

As said above, al-Azraqī claimed that the shrine was incorporated into the pilgrimage ritual. It is said that the pilgrims did not leave the state of *iḥrām* until they had been to the shrine of Nakhla where they would stay for a day⁶²¹. Thus it is presumed that some ritual took place there which ended the state of purity, though al-Azraqī does not say what it was. That this should have happened does not appear to be unique in Arabia at this time. In the case of the goddess Manāt, the inhabitants of Medina, who held her as the highest idol, would make the pilgrimage as normal, but would not shave their heads until they reached the place where the idol stood. There they would shave their heads and thus end their pilgrimage⁶²².

Whatever the reason for her situation in Nakhla and under whose authority it took place, it is certain that her shrine there was associated with trees. Ibn Ḥabīb states that "al-ʿUzzā was a tree at Nakhla, next to which there was an idol worshipped by Ghaṭafān"⁶²³, although usually she is believed to have had three sacred trees at her shrine, the three *samaurāt* or acacia trees⁶²⁴.

The other major place associated with the cult of al-ʿUzzā in the Arabic texts is her place of sacrifice, al-Ghabghab⁶²⁵. The location of al-Ghabghab is not explicitly given in the ibn al-Kalbī text, though it was probably not distant from the shrine at Nakhla, or was near to other holy places, "We swore first by the House of Allah and

⁶²¹ Al-Azraqī i.74.

⁶²² Ibn al-Kalbī p14 (p12 in translation) .

⁶²³ Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb al-Muḥabbar*, p315.

⁶²⁴ Ibn al-Kalbī stated that she was a she-devil who belonged to three 'samaurat' trees in the valley of Nakhla (p25, p 21 in translation).

⁶²⁵ Ibn al-Kalbī p20-21 (p18 in translation).

failing that by the baetyls in which al-Ghabghab stand⁶²⁶. Ibn al-Kalbī also gives the following verse recited by Nuḥaykah al-Fazarī to ʿĀmr b. al-Ṭufayl, which may also indicate that the deities associated with the two named places had an astral quality

O ʿĀmr! If we had but overtaken you with our spears,
By the stars that watch over Mina and al-Ghabghab !
You would have avoided the thrust of a bold warrior by turning your hind
part,
or you would have taken your resting place with neither honour nor
shroud⁶²⁷.

Perhaps the most interesting piece of poetry given by Ibn al-Kalbī dealing with al-Ghabghab was said to have come from a piece of satire composed by al-Hudhalī about a man who married a woman called Asma' and it goes as follows;

Asmā' was married by the jawbone of a little red cow
Which one of the Banū Ghanm had offered for sacrifice
As he led it to the Ghabghab of al-ʿUzzā,
He noticed a blemish in its eyes,
And when the cow was offered upon the altar
And it was cut into portions his portion was bad⁶²⁸

This passage is interesting as it mentions the sacrifice of a red cow, which may be likened to the sacrifice of a red heifer of Israel. The red heifer has a very significant place as a Biblical sacrifice, being the ultimate offering which atoned for all the sins of the entire people. It could be that the "little red cow" occupied a place of some esteem in the Arabian theory of sacrifice, given that one of the qualities of the red heifer was its extreme rarity, thus it may have been similarly valuable to the Arabs. The note about the blemish in the eye of the cow and the fact that the sacrificial portion was bad may also demonstrate a feature of the way the Arabs thought about

⁶²⁶ Ibn al-Kalbī p21 (p19 in translation). On the authority of Qays b. Hudadiyah.

⁶²⁷ Ibn al-Kalbī p21 (p18-19 in translation).

⁶²⁸ Ibn al-Kalbī p20 (p 18 in translation). This same verse is given in Ibn Hishām vol.1 p84 (p38 in translation).

sacrifice. It could be that the Arabs had the belief that as the cow had an eye defect meant that it was imperfect and therefore inappropriate as a sacrifice.

The shrine to al-ʿUzzā was destroyed on the 17th of Ramaḍān in the year 8A.H./630 CE ⁶²⁹. It is generally acknowledged that she was destroyed by Khālīd b. al-Walīd on the orders of Muḥammad following the conquest of Mecca and subsequent Muslim domination of religious life in the Hejaz⁶³⁰. Up until the conquest of Mecca any destruction of the shrine would have been impossible as the Muslims did not have sufficient dominance over the Quraysh.

The accounts of the destruction of the shrine are broadly similar, with some variations in length and content. The most detailed account of the destruction comes from ibn al-Kalbī, which will be given in below slightly edited⁶³¹;

In the year of the conquest, the Prophet summoned Khālīd b. al-Walīd and said to him, "Go to the valley of Nakhla and cut it down". Khālīd went there, captured Dubayya⁶³² the sādīn of al-ʿUzzā and killed him. Abū Khirāsh al-Hudhalī said on Dubayya:
"What is wrong with Dubayya? For days I have not seen him
Among the wine drinkers; he did not come, nor did he appear.
If he were alive he would have come with a cup
Made by the Banū Hatīf and filled with the oil of Bacchus.
He is generous and noble, no sooner are his wine cups filled
Than they are empty, like an old tank full of holes in mid winter,
Suqām has become desolate, deserted by all its friends
Except the wild beasts and the wind blows through its empty chambers."
We were told by al-Anāzī abū-ʿAlī that ʿAlī ibn al-Ṣabbāḥ had told him that he himself was informed by Abu al-Mundhir who reported that his father had told him on the authority of Abū Ṣāliḥ that ibn ʿAbbās said; al-ʿUzzā was a she-devil which used to frequent three trees in the valley of Nakhla. When the Prophet captured Mecca he sent Khālīd ibn al-Walīd saying, "Go to the valley of Nakhla and there you will see three trees. Cut down the first one".

⁶²⁹ Al-Wāqidi, vol.3 p6. Ibn al-Kalbī gives no specific date for the destruction of the shrine only that it occurred in the year of victory (p24 / p21 in translation). By this it is assumed that ibn al-Kalbī means the year in which Mecca was conquered by the Muslims.

⁶³⁰ Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb al-Muḥabbar*, p164, Ibn Hishām vol.4 p436-7 (p565 in translation) Ibn al-Kalbī p24 (p21 in translation) Al-Ṭabarī *Taʾrīkh* I p1647-8 (vol.8 p187-8, translation by Fishbein).

⁶³¹ Ibn al-Kalbī p23-27 (20-22 in translation). On the authority of ibn ʿAbbās The translation is based on that by N. Faris. The editing of the passage was limited to the removal of the linguistic notes, which it may be noted were not included in the Faris English translation. Any points related to the destruction have been retained.

⁶³² Dubayya b. Haramī al-Sulamī.

Khālid went and cut it down. On his return the Prophet asked him "Have you seen anything?" Khālid replied and said "No". The Prophet ordered him to return and cut down the second tree. He went and cut it down. On his return the Prophet asked him a second time "Have you seen anything?" Khālid replied "No". Then the Prophet ordered him to go back and cut down the third tree. When Khālid arrived on the scene he found a black woman with dishevelled hair and her hands placed on her shoulder, gnashing and grating her teeth. Behind her stood Dubayya al-Sulamī who was the sādīn of al-ʿUzzā . When Dubayya saw Khālid approaching he said,
 "O al-ʿUzzā ! Remove thy veil and tuck up thy sleeves,
 Summon up your strength and deal Khālid an unmistakable blow
 Because unless you kill him today,
 You shall be doomed to ignominy and shame"
 Khālid replied
 "O al-ʿUzzā! May you be blasphemed and not exalted!
 Truly I see that Allah has abased you!"
 Turning to the woman he dealt her a blow which severed her head in two and she crumbled into ashes. He then cut down the tree and killed Dubayya the sādīn after which he returned to the Prophet and reported to him what had happened.
 Then the Prophet said, "That was al-ʿUzzā . But she is no more. The Arabs shall have none after her. Truly she shall never be worshipped again"

The above account from Ibn al-Kalbī gives what appears to be a quite literary account, that is the style appears to be one which would be a written account of an oral tale. The repetition of the pattern of Khālid going to Muḥammad and being sent three times to perform the same task has the appearance of a literary account rather than a historical one. It seems odd that Muḥammad, finally having the opportunity to destroy the principal shrine to the goddess, would make such an lengthy process of it rather than sending Khālid to destroy all three trees at once. It may also be noted that Khālid's verse on destroying al-ʿUzzā is interesting as it does not imply a lack of belief in the deity. He addressed her directly and said that she would never be worshipped again as Allah had taken over . This does not seem to suggest that Khālid at least has given up believing in her existence or that she is a goddess, but only that Allah is stronger and more powerful and therefore he will follow his cult.

This rather dramatic telling is the main area in which the Ibn al-Kalbī account differs from the others, although there are some other details. Al-Wāqidi

describes Khālīd going out to destroy al-ʿUzzā taking 30 horsemen of the companions with him⁶³³. He claimed to have destroyed her, though no mention of cutting down trees was made, but Muḥammad asked him if he had seen anything and he said he had not, upon which he was sent back. Khālīd was enraged at being sent back and when he drew near to the shrine he pulled out his sword and then there came out to him the black woman with dishevelled hair. The poetry recited by Dubayya before the destruction of the shrine is slightly different too, although the meaning appears to be unchanged.

The al-Wāqidī account is significantly shorter than ibn al-Kalbī and contains only the outline of the story. The difference in the accounts may come from the different isnāds given, and also that al-Wāqidī was writing for a different purpose. He wrote specifically about the Muslim raids and conquests, and his account reflects this interest as it dwells on the number of horsemen and companions rather than giving an account of the idol. This may account for why it was shorter and less detailed, though the fact that it is considered separately to the conquest of Mecca rather than as an incidental part thereof perhaps suggests that it was considered a matter of some gravity.

The account of the destruction of the idolatrous shrines in al-Ṭabarī is also brief. He gives two slightly different accounts, both only a few lines in length. The first has no isnād. It dates the destruction of the shrine to five nights before the end of Ramaḍān in the year 8 AH⁶³⁴. In this account, Khālīd is dispatched, sees nothing and so is sent back again. This time he broke the idol and destroyed the temple. The guardian began saying "Rage , O ʿUzzā, with one of your fits of rage!", upon which a

⁶³³ Al-Wāqidī, vol.3 p6-8.

⁶³⁴ Al-ʿUzzā is said to be an idol of the Banū Shayban , a sub-division of Sulaym allies of the Banū Hāshim and the Banū Asad b.ʿAbd al-ʿUzzā used to say it was their idol.

wailing, naked, black woman appeared, whom Khālīd killed and took her jewels from her. He told Muḥammad about what had happened, and Muḥammad replied that "That was al-ʿUzzā . . . and al-ʿUzzā will never be worshipped again"⁶³⁵. This account does not mention the Quraysh specifically worshipping her, though al-Ṭabarī does state this in his second account. The appearance of the black woman when he destroys the shrine is also slightly different. Here Khālīd is said to have taken her jewels, something not stated in any of the other accounts. Offerings of jewellery appear to have been made to the goddess, as elsewhere it is stated that Muḥammad wanted to strip them of their jewels, and when they were renounced they had their jewels removed⁶³⁶.

The second account is on the authority of Ibn Humayd - Salamah - Ibn Ishāq, and therefore is almost identical to the next account to be discussed, which comes from the Ibn Hishām recension of Ibn Ishāq⁶³⁷. This account is brief. He wrote that after the conquest Khālīd was sent by Muḥammad to Nakhla to destroy the shrine, and there is no account of trees and multiple attempts to destroy them. There are two significant points about the Ibn Hishām account which make it different to the two given above. Firstly, the guardian, who is identified correctly if rather vaguely, as one of the Banū Shayban b. Sulaym, is described as climbing onto the mountain on which the idol stood. In none of the other sources is there any mention of al-ʿUzzā being on a mountain, indeed she is usually described in a valley. The guardian hung his sword on the idol and recited poetry which is basically the same as the

⁶³⁵ Al-Ṭabarī *Taʾrīkh* I p1648 (vol.8 p187 in translation, Fishbein). This extract is Fishbein's translation.

⁶³⁶ See below where the offerings to the deities and the destruction of Muḥammad's anti-polytheistic activities are described.

⁶³⁷ Ibn Hishām vol.4 p436-7 (p565 in translation).

other two poems given in the first two lines, but ends rather differently, saying " O al-ʿUzzā, if you do not kill this man Khālīd then bear a swift punishment or become a Christian"⁶³⁸. This hanging of the sword on the idol implies that he thought the idol was going to do something to save itself.

Arafat suggested that "this picture of a black woman at the shrine of al-ʿUzzā would suggest a statuette of an ancient Pharaoh's attendant infused with life to magnify scanty information into a complete and vivid myth"⁶³⁹. There seem to be two possibilities. The black woman was, as Arafat suggested, in reality a statue, which through perhaps a desire on the part of Khālīd to glorify his vanquishing of the goddess even further, was 'brought to life' to give the story a more dramatic conclusion, or, that there was in fact a woman at the shrine whom Khālīd really did kill⁶⁴⁰.

Both ideas have a degree of merit. That there could well have been an idol at the shrine is a strong possibility, given that there is a reference to al-ʿUzzā being an idol rather than simply a cube of rock as were so many other deities. That the idol is black is not necessarily significant, given that there was a black stone at the Kaʿba therefore such rock was not unknown to the Arabs. Arafat's suggestion that the idol was perhaps an Egyptian statuette is a possibility, though he gives no explanation as to why he thinks this. As was noted, it has been suggested that al-ʿUzzā was of

⁶³⁸ Ibn Hishām vol.4 p436-7 (p565 in translation). Guillaume suggests in his footnotes to the passage that the word used for to become a Christian, *tanassari*, actually means to become a Muslim but to the reciter of the poetry there would not be any difference between the two faiths. This explanation is perhaps incorrect as it implies that the people of the time had no concepts of other faiths, which given the mixed religious milieu seems an incorrect assumption.

⁶³⁹ Arafat, p18.

⁶⁴⁰ The Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī mentions both a black woman and a woman with dishevelled hair in the interpretation of dreams. Both appear to be bad omens relating to an epidemic of plague. While this may not shed any light on who this woman was, it appears that in Islamic terms, such women were not regarded as positive.

Sinaitic origin, and as that territory was in Egyptian hands it may well have been such a statue. The coming to life of a statue to fight for its cause however would almost seem to give credence to the idea that al-ʿUzzā was real and that there was a deity who could defend herself by bringing to life the piece of rock in which she lived. This surely would have gone against the Islamic idea that there were no other deities than Allah and therefore one could not have defended itself. This said, in Ibn al-Kalbī, when Khālīd returns to Muḥammad and informs him that the task is complete, Muḥammad said that that was al-ʿUzzā. It seems that perhaps, if the Ibn al-Kalbī account is accurate that Muḥammad believed he had won a victory against the deity.

It cannot be regarded as true that a statue came to life. It could be that there was a living person whom Khālīd did kill, and this person may have been a cult official of al-ʿUzzā. However, while Ibn al-Kalbī and other sources give her a guardian, a sādīn, from the Banū Shayban b. Sulaym, there is no mention of any other officiant attached to the shrine at Nakhla. It may be speculated that there was a priestess of some description there, perhaps a kāhina, and this was the person whom Khālīd actually killed. The sādīn mentioned in the texts would probably have been capable of fulfilling the duties of the cult, which presumably included oracles and sacrifices. Therefore the nature and function of the person seen at Nakhla is unclear.

Al-ʿUzzā in the Arabic Sources - Mecca.

Although she was the most worshipped deity of the Quraysh, there is very little textual evidence placing her in the epicentre of Qurayshite power, Mecca itself. The

only definite reference to al-‘Uzzā being a named goddess of the sanctuary come in a fragmentary texts of *Taḥrīr al-Maqāl* by al-Marrākusi⁶⁴¹.

It is said that the Quraysh would circumambulate the Ka‘ba reciting the verse which is later seen as one of the abrogated verses of the Qur’ān,

By Allāt and al-‘Uzzā
And Manāt the third idol besides
Truly they are the Numidian cranes⁶⁴²
Whose intercession is to be sought⁶⁴³

It may be regarded as unlikely that the Quraysh would make this talbiyya at the Ka‘ba if not one of the deities mentioned were present there. Given that according to traditional Muslim sources there were numerous idols at the Ka‘ba, it is not inconceivable that al-‘Uzzā may have been present as she was the supreme idol of Quraysh. The Quraysh, it may be suggested, would have their most important god in the town under their control.

It appears that the shrine at Nakhla was originally in some way in competition with that at Mecca, constructed by the Banū Ghaṭafān. That the Quraysh adopted this shrine was perhaps inevitable given that it was associated with their deity and it was incorporated into the pilgrimage rituals.

It may be useful to consider the way in which the morning star was portrayed in the Qur’ān. Surā al-Ṭāriq was named for the morning star as it begins with a discussion of the star and its attributes. The revelation was said to have come to Muḥammad one evening while he was sitting eating bread and laban with Abū Ṭālib.

⁶⁴¹ This manuscript is referred to by ‘Abbās in his article “Two Hitherto Unpublished Texts on Pre-Islamic Religion”, *Actes du 8me Congrès de l’union européenne d’arabisants et Islamisants* (1976).

⁶⁴² Bell translated *gharāniq* as swans *Bell’s Introduction to the Qur’ān* p317.

⁶⁴³ Ibn al-Kalbī p19 (17 in translation). These verses are the same as the Satanic Verses (sūra LII:19-21). Ibn Ḥabīb gives an alternative talbiyya for al-‘Uzzā in the *Kitāb al-Muḥabbar* based on the more conventional form for talbiyyāt, p415.

Abū Ṭālib saw the star appear in the sky and asked Muḥammad what it was.

Muḥammad answered that it was the morning star and that it was one of the signs of Allah⁶⁴⁴.

This explanation of the star is a suitably Islamic one, but it may be that the commentators themselves knew of another side to it. In the *tafsīr* of al-Zamakshārī, it is stated that the star has an association with the jinn. The jinn, it is known, were often the familiars of the soothsayers and poets, thus were symbolic of supernatural forces both good and bad. This hint at a link with religious practices is strengthened by the further explanation given about the nature of the star. The commentary on the line *al-nagm al-thāqib*, the piercing star, is that it was a type of star or bright meteor, by which “stones were cast”. Al-Zamakshārī adds to this description of a star by which stones are cast that, as part of Muḥammad’s explanation to Abū Ṭālib he stated that it was “the star by which we throw”⁶⁴⁵. This is significant in the light of the practice of pessomancy, or taking oracles by means of throwing stones. The polytheistic Arabs may have believed in the divinity of the star and thus trusted intermediaries to take counsel from the deity it represented. What adds even further interest to this is that the name of the Morning Star in Arabic is al-Ṭāriq derived from the root ṭ-r-q, which is also the root of the verb to cast an oracle by means of throwing stones. It would appear then that the practice of pessomancy and the morning star were closely associated with one another⁶⁴⁶.

⁶⁴⁴ *Tafsīr* of al-Zamakshārī, sūra al-Ṭāriq, p724, *Tafsīr* of al-Baghawī p 472.

⁶⁴⁵ *Tafsīr* of al-Zamakshārī, sūra al-Ṭāriq p724.

⁶⁴⁶ It may be observed that in the previous chapter Muḥammad had spoken out against all oracles but that pessomancy was the subject of particular criticism. It may be that the morning star deity, i.e. al-‘Uzzā and this form of divination were so closely related that by prohibiting one he hoped to curtail the cult of the goddess.

The Case for al-ʿUzzā as a Warrior Deity.

Perhaps one of the most surprising attributes of the goddesses in the ancient east was that they were often the patrons of war. War is to such a great extent viewed as a male domain to find the deity to whom the warriors might turn is female seems perhaps rather incongruous. However, on examination this is not necessarily the case at all, and may be rather logical.

The religious devotions of the warrior are discussed more fully elsewhere, but here the matter tackled will be how the deity of war could have been female and if so could al-ʿUzzā have been such a deity.

It often seems that the goddess could straddle both the worlds of the living and the dead, such as Istar's descent into the underworld to rescue her lover Tammuz. Classical mythology similarly holds examples of goddesses going back and forth between the worlds. Thus, they could act as a bridge between the two. The notion of having a war deity who is also a fertility deity is not problematic for two reasons. Niditch gives the theory that "associations between eroticism and death and between sex and violence are old and intimate ones. . . affecting the essential nature of human self-consciousness"⁶⁴⁷, an idea echoed by Tikva Frymer-Kensky who hypothesised that "this goddess who combines the passions of sex and violence has had a long hold on the human imagination and has been widely manifest throughout human cultures", her reasoning being that blood lust and sexual lust produce the same basic responses in man⁶⁴⁸. This, in conjunction with the idea that the goddess was associated not only with fertility but rebirth, may well help to show why the two

⁶⁴⁷ S. Niditch, quoted in Day *JNES* 51 (1992)p43.

⁶⁴⁸ Frymer-Kensky *In the Wake of the Goddess* p67.

seemingly opposed facets could exist in the same deity, for example, the goddess Athene was thought to have been a peace-lover and a warrior⁶⁴⁹ It is no more peculiar than the one deity of monotheistic cults who can embody all attributes at once.

In addition to this, it will be remembered that one of the creatures associated often with goddesses, and also with al-‘Uzzā, is the snake. The ability of the snake to shed its skin and thus be reborn regularly may have a great deal of symbolism. A story which combines all these elements is found in Egyptian mythology, and deals with the goddess Isis and how she tricked Ra into giving her ultimate power. Isis fashioned a snake from dust and spit, and left it where she knew Ra would walk. The snake bit him, and Isis convinced him that the only way she could cure him of the poison was to know his secret name. She wrote the name on a piece of paper which she dissolved and gave him to drink and he was restored to life again⁶⁵⁰. This story shows several elements of Near Eastern belief, not least of which being the power of the name, but for this discussion it shows a goddess in mastery over the snake, the use of the snake by the goddess to kill and the ability of the goddess to restore to life.

The essential point of this discussion is that the goddess can give life, can take it away and can restore it again. That the goddess has in her power all these things makes her an obvious deity to invoke in war.

The warrior goddesses of the east are often variations on each other, each successive civilisation adopting her and making her their own. It would appear that even before the goddess can be identified as Semitic, the Sumerian deity Innana did

⁶⁴⁹ Février, p16.

⁶⁵⁰ Budge, *The Gods of Egypt* p38. Budge noted that the same method was used by Egyptians until his time to cure snake bites, though the words dissolved to be swallowed are from the Qur’ān.

not conform to a traditionally womanly role. She represented those qualities not associated with a potential wife and mother, rather those of a young man and sexual freedom, indeed in the Agushaya Hymn her love of warfare was called her *zikrutu* or manliness⁶⁵¹. The Semitic development of Innana was Istar. She was also identified with battles and was known as *muttabbilat kakke*, the bearer of arms, and the "goddess of battle and warfare who goes by the side of the king, favourite one, the terrible one of his enemies"⁶⁵². The cult of the war goddess came to prominence at Nineveh, where it was promoted by Asurbanipal, and from 3000 BCE onwards she was depicted on seals with weapons such as the club, sword and bow. Asurbanipal was mentioned in the following hymn from Mesopotamia:

I Asurbanipal, the frightened, who fear you / who seize the fringe of your divinity, who prays to you as mistress / look upon me lady. And then I will worship your decision / You who are angry have mercy upon me so that your countenance may be soothed! ⁶⁵³.

An obscure cult of Istar of the Suti provides an early hymn in which her epithets are listed as 'the rising', 'the bright', 'the lions' and 'the subjugator'⁶⁵⁴. The first two appear to suggest an astral element to her character, notably the rising may point to her as the morning star. The link between deities and lions does not seem to be an uncommon feature of Semitic religions as lions are seen depicted often in religious works and there was in fact a lion deity in pre-Islamic Arabia. The epithet of subjugator would seem to suggest that the goddess was a patron of victory in war.

Throughout the ancient period, peoples exchanged and shared deities to such an extent that differentiating between them can become problematic. Sometimes, the peoples themselves seem to have no knowledge of the origins of their deities and

⁶⁵¹ Frymer-Kensky p30.

⁶⁵² ERE, War and War-gods.p699.

⁶⁵³ *Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, Bayerlin (ed.) p115.

⁶⁵⁴ Barton, *Hebraica* X p27.

although they may all be manifestations of the same original figure they become distinct enough to be depicted together, such as the three versions of Astarte on the Winchester College Stele⁶⁵⁵.

‘Anat was the goddess of war and hunting in Ugarit. What is known of her comes from the texts found on the clay tablets of the archaeological site, and also there are depictions of her found on artefacts from the city. She appears to have been a bloodthirsty goddess, described as wading through the blood of her enemies whom she vanquished without mercy. In addition to this, she had a role as a huntress and protector of animals. Sadly, no figurative representations of al-‘Uzzā have been found, so it is hard to say that al-‘Uzzā would have been depicted in a similar fashion. However, if one considers that al-‘Uzzā has clear links with gazelles and the snake, and these are two of the creatures with which the goddess Anat is shown (see Figure I) it may be suggested that they had similar attributes. As has been demonstrated above, al-‘Uzzā was a cognate deity of those described above and as such may have had the warrior attribute found among other northern goddesses.

The dual nature of the deities who were associated with the planet Venus has been noted and as noted above, al-‘Uzzā may not have existed alone.

It seems that both al-‘Uzzā and Allāt were deities invoked by the Quraysh during battles and were present at Uhud⁶⁵⁶. Neither seems to have had a particular dominance over the other, at least none that is inferred from the way to which they are referred in the texts. While there are references to the cavalry of Allāt⁶⁵⁷, from

⁶⁵⁵ Edwards, “A Relief of Qudshu - Astarte -Anat in the Winchester College Collection” *JNES* 14 (1955).

⁶⁵⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh* I p1495 (vol.7 p114 translation by Watt and McDonald), Agh. 14/ 15 with the same isnād as al-Ṭabarī, on the authority of al-Zubayr.

⁶⁵⁷ Ibn Hishām vol.4 p404-5 (p548 in translation). There is another reference to the cavalry of Allāt after the polytheists lost the battle of Ḥunayn. A woman of the Muslims said that on

the battle of Uḥud Abū Sufyān attributes the Meccan victory to al-‘Uzzā⁶⁵⁸. Manāt is not mentioned at all in these events, and it seems unlikely that she was of any particular significance to the Quraysh or any of the major Meccan tribes in spite of the potentially manufactured verse ascribed to the Meccans. The deity Hubal is mentioned in the story of Uḥud, as Abū Sufyān states that he is exalted by the victory⁶⁵⁹. It may be proposed that as Hubal is associated with Mecca rather than with any specific tribe, the exaltation of the Meccan deity was linked to the victory of the Meccans rather than a tribal or cultic victory in that context.

Conclusion of Chapter Five.

As one of the main strands of this work is the role and involvement of women in religious life, this will now be surveyed with regard to the cult of al-‘Uzzā. Various aspects of her cult have been discussed, and she was found to be part of a tradition of deities that covered the Near East in antiquity. She was the main deity of the Quraysh, and was venerated by other tribes in Arabia, but it appears that she was worshipped more widely than that as traces of her cult have been found in other areas of the east, mostly from the Holy Land and Sinai. Aspects of that cult have been considered, and it appears that there were two main ways suggested by what has been said above which would have involved women in her cult.

that day the cavalry of Allah had beaten that of Allāt (Ibn Hishām vol.4 p449, p572 in translation).

⁶⁵⁸ Al-Ṭabarī *Ta’rīkh* I p1417-8 (vol. 7 p131 translation by Watt and McDonald). In an exchange between ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭab and Abū Sufyān, the latter stated that they had won on the day because “We have al-‘Uzzā and you have no ‘Uzzā”.

⁶⁵⁹ Ibn Hishām vol.3 p93 (p386 in translation), al-Ṭabarī *Ta’rīkh* I vol.1 p1417-8. (Vol. 7p131 translation by Watt and McDonald). In the Persian version of the text of al-Ṭabarī, it is said that Abū Sufyān brought Hubal to Uḥud in a litter on a camel and placed it on the battle lines behind a row of women (trans. Zotenberg part 3, p17/23).

The first way is that there is a possibility that al-ʿUzzā would have had a priestess. The account of the destruction of her shrine suggests that she had a female cult official of some description as there is the unexplained woman killed there by Khālīd b. al-Walīd.

The second is that if there was a fertility cult surrounding the goddess that women may have been actively involved in the cult, as suggested by the gathering of the women in the Kaʿba at Rajab.

There is one other major way in which women were involved in the service of the goddess, and that service took place on the battlefield. It was necessary to discuss the cult of al-ʿUzzā in some detail in order to progress to a discussion of women in warfare as on occasion they took part in battles in the service of this goddess. The discussion of her relationship to Allāt, and how this may also be indicative of a role in warfare for the goddess, was also necessary before going on to discuss the religious nature of warfare for women. So it is to warfare that this study will now progress, and there perhaps one of the most interesting roles of women in the service of the deity will be discussed.

Chapter Six.

The Religious Role of Women in Battle.

In chapter four it was noted that in their capacity as *kāhināt* women could be present during battles with their tribes. This chapter continues this theme with a discussion of the religious aspects of warfare before Islam, focusing on the part played by women in the service of the cult of Venus during tribal conflict.

In the previous chapter al-‘Uzzā’s characteristic as a warrior deity was discussed. It may be considered possible that deities were present on the battlefield and this presence will be demonstrated by a discussion of the *qubba* and its symbolic role. The *qubba* may have also manifested itself in the ceremonial litters of the tribes in which women went into battle, as discussed in chapter three. Lastly, the guild of women known as the *Banāt Ṭāriq* will be examined in detail.

Religious Nature of Warfare in Arabia and the Near East.

In discussing the Arab world and war, the word that immediately springs to mind is *jihād*. However, *jihād* is an entirely Islamic concept and should not be considered as a model for the religious aspect of non-Islamic Arab warfare.

The ideas behind the spiritual nature of war in a non-Islamic context were not related to the glorification of the faith. Unlike under Islam, fighting was not done in the name of a deity per se. However, the deity was of some importance in the larger battles fought between the tribes, and as will be demonstrated, was seen to be actually present. Action was not taken on behalf of the deity, they did not fight for it, but rather it acted as a talisman for victory and could put its divine weight behind the 'right' side.

Before battles or any circumstances in which the individual would be in combat it seems vows may have been entered into. These vows could be accompanied by the individual taking on some form of consecrated state. This seems to have meant remaining in a state of elevated purity until the vow had been fulfilled even when there is no mention of a deity. A person involved in a feud would not wash, comb their hair or shave, would wear dirty clothes and eat little⁶⁶⁰ and in times of war the Arabs would abstain from wine, women and perfume⁶⁶¹. An example of this type of vow is that of Abū Sufyān when Quraysh set out to march from Mecca to Medina;

Return to the attack on Yathrib and the lot of them / for what they have
collected is booty for you,
Though the battle of the cistern went in their favour / the future will restore
your fortunes,
I swear I will not come near women / nor shall I use the water of
purification
Until you destroy the tribes of Aus and Khazraj / my heart is burning for
revenge⁶⁶²

This verse seems to indicate a state of ritual purity. The vow states that he would not go near women nor the water of purification. This shows that he will not go near women as that might cause him to become impure. This may appear a familiar idea from Muslim laws regarding the purity of the person, but it should be noted that the pagan Arabs had a very strong concept of purity and pollution and the accompanying need to 'atone' for it⁶⁶³.

Similar vows of abstinence occur in the ayyām. Before the Yaum Khazar, when Muhallal saw the blood of Kulaib he cut off his hair, bleached his robe, shunned women, gambling and drinking and also gave up raiding until the matter

⁶⁶⁰ Wangtendonk, *Fasting in the Koran* 1968 p38.

⁶⁶¹ Wangtendonk p38.

⁶⁶² Al-Ṭabarī *Ta'rikh* I p1366 (vol.7 p90 translation by Watt and McDonald).

⁶⁶³ Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb al-Muḥabbar* p319. For a discussion of general concepts of purity see M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*.

was settled⁶⁶⁴. After hearing of the death of his father, the poet king of Kinda, Imru'l-qais swore to give up wine and women until he had killed 100 of the Banū Asad in revenge for the death⁶⁶⁵.

This idea appears to have continued the early years of the Muslim era. The constituents of the vow had undergone a necessary modification under Islam. As wine and gambling and other vices were no longer permitted, the only thing the man was able to give up was women⁶⁶⁶. Zayd b. Ḥāritha, in swearing that he would have revenge on the tribe of Fazāra for the wounds he suffered at the battle of Wādī al-Qura, is reported to have vowed that no washing to cleanse himself from impurity should touch his head until he had raided them⁶⁶⁷. This implies that he was determined not to cause himself to enter into a state of major ritual impurity until he had fulfilled his vow. When Ḥanzala b. Abū 'Amir was killed the Muslims asked his wife about his condition when he left, and she replied that he had heard the cry to war and left in a hurry, as a result he was killed in a state of impurity. Muḥammad assured her that the angels would wash his body⁶⁶⁸.

Indeed, it would seem that the vow to abstain from women appears to have survived into modern times, according to a poem attributed to the Rwala poet, Khalaf al-Idhen;

I said that the sisters of Qutna attacked us, though not at feud,
And their maidens came back with our fair camels from where the herds
spent the winter
The news was true and the men shook their heads about it
And whoever had a wife ceased to press her breasts⁶⁶⁹

⁶⁶⁴ Ibn al-Athīr, p390.

⁶⁶⁵ Ibn al-Athīr p378.

⁶⁶⁶ A Muslim warrior at Badr abstained from dates (Ibn Hisham vol.2 p627). It may be speculated that this was part of the prohibition on date liquor, or perhaps because they were seen as a source of pleasure and thus incompatible with the spirit of war.

⁶⁶⁷ Ibn Hishām vol.4 p617-8 (p664 in translation).

⁶⁶⁸ Ibn Hishām vol.3 p74-5 (p377 in translation).

⁶⁶⁹ Meeker, *Literature and Violence in North Arabia*, (1979), p125.

Wangtendonk believed that the vows of sexual abstinence must be religious as they cannot be logically explained⁶⁷⁰. This view perhaps does not take into account the fact that abstinence from women may mean that the warrior would be more fit and alert for battle and no wine meant he would not appear to fight the worse for drink. Oesterley takes the point further, stating that any physical contact with a woman would render a man effeminate⁶⁷¹. The abstinence from women as part of entering into a vow is obviously, in spite of the possible psychological advantages, no doubt in an attempt to avoid becoming impure.

This abstinence from women is an element of the pre-war vow among Biblical warriors. An incident involving King David not only demonstrates that abstinence was practised by his army, but also hints at the fact that there were two distinct kinds of campaign, something which it will become apparent was also the case in early Arabia. In 1 Sam. 21:5 David says "Indeed women have been kept from us, as usual when ever I set out. The men's things are holy even on missions that are not holy. How much more so today"⁶⁷². What David may mean by this is that on minor expeditions the Ark would not be present and on major ones it would, which seems entirely parallel to the Arab practice of only taking the qubba on important battles and never on minor raids.

This shows that the warriors were consecrated to their task and part of this was abstinence from women, indeed it seems here that women were forbidden to

⁶⁷⁰ Wangtendonk, p39.

⁶⁷¹ Oesterley *The Sacred Dance* (1923)p178.

⁶⁷² This was in the context of David going to the priest Ahimelech at Nob. David asked for bread for he and his men. The priest replied that the only bread he had was consecrated and could only be given them if they had not touched women.

the warriors before any kind of military activity at all⁶⁷³. This does not appear to have extended to Arabia. Al-Wāqidī and Ibn Hishām both record that some of the noblemen of Quraysh took their wives along with them⁶⁷⁴ and it is known that Muḥammad would take one of his wives on raids with him⁶⁷⁵. So, it may be that here there is a divergence in practice between the two peoples, although it does not state in the text that taking wives on raids or to battles did not mean that they had not taken a vow of abstinence, as Abū Sufyān consecrated himself to revenge but still took his wife with him⁶⁷⁶. The consecration before campaigns by David and his army is again like those vows of abstinence taken by the Arabs.

Another possible indication that the men of Arabia were consecrating themselves to battle is the ritual shaving of the head which was a pre-battle practice of certain tribes. The practical purpose of this has already been discussed in chapter three, but it may have a ritual importance as well. Shaving the head has a religious connotation in Islam as part of the Hājj, but it was also a feature of pagan ritual, in the 'Aqīqa ceremony for example⁶⁷⁷. Also, the shaving of Labīd's head as noted in chapter four was also thought to have a semi-magical meaning. A hint to the significance of the head-shaving ritual for the polytheists may be derived from Muḥammad's attitude to it. After the battle day of Ḥudaybiyya Muḥammad

⁶⁷³ In 1 Sam.xi:11 Uriah says to David that while the men of Israel and the Ark are in tents in the fields, he will not go home to his wife. This could simply mean that he would not enjoy home comforts while the rest of the men were camping out, but it could also mean that he could not as it would risk entering into impurity. Keeping the area where the Ark would be pure is also demonstrated by Deuteronomy 23:9-13 where it is ordered that no human waste should be left within the 'assembly', i.e. where the Ark was with the people.

⁶⁷⁴ Al-Wāqidī vol.2 p272 Ibn Hishām vol.3 p62 (p371 in translation).

⁶⁷⁵ See chapter three.

⁶⁷⁶ Al-Wāqidī vol.2 p272 Ibn Hishām vol.3 p62 (p371 in translation) al-Ṭabarī *Ta'rikh* I p1394 (vol. 7 p113 translation by Watt and McDonald).

⁶⁷⁷ The 'Aqīqa ceremony was performed on children and involved shaving the head of the child and smearing it with the blood of a sacrificial animal. This sacrifice was said to consecrate the child to the deity. It has been suggested that the child was the correct sacrifice and that the animal was a substitute. Robertson-Smith, *Religion*, p310.

condemned those who had shaved their heads, though had a slightly more lenient attitude towards those who had only clipped their hair⁶⁷⁸. He eventually condemned both, though he explained that the difference between them was that those who had shaved had shown no doubt in their idolatry.

It does not appear that women took on the same sort of consecration to a vow as the men. The only example seen in the histories of a woman swearing revenge is Hind bint 'Utba at Uḥud, and even then she does not herself kill the party upon whom she wants revenge and there is no evidence of her taking a vow.

The Ceremonial Litter . ⁶⁷⁹

In chapter three it was shown that women were present in battle in a litter on a camel which was the focus of the fighting for the warriors. While this undoubtedly would have held no small importance in the incitement to bravery and the defence

⁶⁷⁸ Ibn Hishām vol.3 p319 (p505 in translation).

⁶⁷⁹ In 1945 Julius Morgenstern published his work *The Ark, the Ephod and the Tent of Meeting*, an expansion of his earlier research on the origins and history of the Ark of the Covenant. This volume explored the similarities between the structures of the Israelites and sacred objects of the Arabs, both in a pre-Islamic and Muslim context. A great acknowledgement must be made to this work, as it began to draw together some of the themes which it is hoped this section will further explore. As Morgenstern highlighted the contribution to the study of the ceremonial litter made by Lammens, in his original 1919 article *Le culte des Betyles et les processions religieuses chez les arabes préislamites* it is also necessary to do that here. In both cases, and these are the two main studies of the object from a theological rather than a quasi-anthropological perspective, it appears that the scholars were entirely correct in their analysis. While a certain amount of repetition of their earlier studies is inevitable here, it is necessary to clearly trace a path through the material presented by these scholars, in order that it might be added to by works of later scholars and also original analysis. The term ceremonial litter which is employed here is used as a general term for all litters used in this ritual way, as the litters themselves appear to have had different names in different tribes. It is perhaps notable that in all the Islamic texts the one term, *howdāj*, is used throughout. This term does not appear to be of Arabic origin and thus it may be suggested was used by the Muslim writers as it held none of the significance of the earlier terms used which appear in the poetry of the time or in the later folk practices of the Bedouin tribes. The term *howdāj* is usually rendered in English as howdah, and where this term is used it has not been altered to conform to correct transliteration.

of tribal honour, it is quite possible that the ceremonial litters had a quite other symbolism with its origins in religious practices.

Before discussing the ceremonial litter itself it is necessary to sketch out the origins of this piece of religious paraphernalia. It is a common feature of Semitic societies to house the tribal deity in some sort of tent. The bethel, or house of the god, is a term used for any object in which it is believed that a deity might reside. The bethel has been studied primarily from a Biblical perspective, as it was a commonly mentioned item in the Biblical narratives. Some thought has been given to it in an Arab context, notably the works mentioned above and also scholars such as Wellhausen and Robertson-Smith. It appears that the deity was believed to have dwelt in these stones. Robertson -Smith wrote that the use of stones rather than natural objects such as trees or springs was a progression in the relationship between the man and the deity, implying an increased intimacy and commitment as the godhead had made a "permanent pledge that he consents to enter into stated relations with men and accept their service"⁶⁸⁰, a notion which seems to suggest that people took to using stones as a focus of ritual because of their permanence, i.e. they did not die or dry up⁶⁸¹.

It appears that the stone or idol was often kept in a tent by the tribe to which it belonged. It is possible that the use of tents as a sanctuary for the deity existed far into antiquity. The most obvious example of a tent being used to house a deity was the Ark of the ancient Israelites which was eventually placed in the Temple in

⁶⁸⁰ Robertson-Smith, *Religion* p190.

⁶⁸¹ The early Semitic uses of stones as idols and altars has been discussed above in chapter four and it is not necessary to repeat the discussion.

Jerusalem. It appears from Biblical texts that God was believed to dwell in the Ark itself⁶⁸².

Among the Arab tribes, the object which appears to have filled this role is the qubba. In the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* the entry for qubba is a lengthy description of domed buildings which were sites of religious significance from the tombs of holy men to the Dome of the Rock. The qubba of the Arab cults was in many ways much the same, being a domed structure containing an item of religious value. Of course, in early Arabia the qubba was a non-permanent structure, taking the form of a tent easily mounted on a camel saddle for transportation. Sprengling claimed that the qubba being a portable item was a Bedouin idea as the tribes would be required to take their temple with them, while the inhabitants of an agricultural settlement would be able to have a permanent structure⁶⁸³. While this is an obvious statement, it is notable that the form of the permanent structures appear to mimic the portable sanctuaries, an indication that they did not come into existence until later.

The most famous qubba is probably the Ka'ba in Mecca. While it no longer resembles a domed structure in any way, nor has done for several centuries, it is believed that the original structure of the Ka'ba was that of a qubba. The Islamic idea that it was the tent of Adam or a historically more solid low-walled structure with a tented roof over which goats could jump with a kiswah draped over the top⁶⁸⁴, it does appear that the original building resembled closely the Bedouin variety of mobile sanctuary. Thus it appears that perhaps the only adaptation to the original structure when it became permanent was to build a wall round it. Lammens noted

⁶⁸² It was in fact the Shekhinah, or feminine aspect of God which was thought to dwell in the Ark as the Shekhinah was the earthly presence of God.

⁶⁸³ May, "The Ark- A Miniature Temple" *AJSL* 52 (1936) p228. No reference is given for Sprengling's statement.

⁶⁸⁴ Nevo and Koren "The Jahili Meccan Sanctuary", *JNES* 49 (1990)p29

that in very early times, all tents were made out of leather, but even when black goats hair became the fashion the qubba continued to be made out of red leather⁶⁸⁵.

Inside the qubbas, the betyls of the tribe would have been kept, and it is known that they would have been brought into battle in their tents. It has been accepted that the significance of the qubba lay not in the tent itself but in the contents, though the qubba

became the natural symbol of these deities, and especially of their actual presence in moments of need . . . thus the kubbe became itself an object of holiness and reverence but little less objective and compelling than the holiness and reverence of the betyls themselves⁶⁸⁶.

May makes a similar point in respect of the Ark, claiming that to some degree the Ark and God became synonymous⁶⁸⁷.

The qubba containing the tribal deity was attended by cult officials, and it appears that in some instances this escort would be comprised of women. This fact was recollected by Abū Dā'ūd who wrote that in the Jāhiliyya there were female guardians of the 'bait'⁶⁸⁸. Although the word bait is used here it is quite probable that Abū Dā'ūd's bait guardians and the qubba guardians of the other sources are the same groups of people. At the battle of Dhu Qār, the qubba had a female guard,⁶⁸⁹ and similarly during the war between the Daus and the Banū al-Ḥārith the four

⁶⁸⁵ It appears that placing the idol under a covering was a feature elsewhere in the ancient world. The god Amun-Ra of Karnak was woken every day with the performance of a ritual which is described in the Berlin papyrus 3055, a Theban manuscript of the 22nd dynasty. Part of the ritual was called the 'loosening the shrine', in which the leather covering which had been on the back of the god was taken off. Wilson noted in his translation that the covering was some kind of shroud worn by the image of the deity at night. It also appears that this type of ritual was common to all deities. ('Egyptian Rituals and Incantations', translated by J. Wilson p325 in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, ed. James. B. Pritchard.)

⁶⁸⁶ Morgenstern, p64.

⁶⁸⁷ May, *AJS* p230.

⁶⁸⁸ Abū Dā'ūd Sunān I 195.

⁶⁸⁹ Agh. 20 /136-7 and al-Ṭabarī *Ta'rikh* I p1028.

daughters of the chief of the Banū al-Ḥārith were sent to accompany the qubba of the tribe⁶⁹⁰.

Al-Ṭabarī refers to the *qubba turkiyya*, which Muḥammad was said to have pitched at the Battle of the Ditch in 627 CE/ 5AH. Also during the Arab conquests in 638CE/ 16 AH, the Muslim army found qubbas at al-Madā'in in which there was great treasure. Exactly what this treasure was is not stated, though it may be that it contained the type of richly ornamented idols appearing elsewhere in the texts⁶⁹¹. This could have been the tribal idol, the northern Arabian images of idols in qubbas in sacred processions and so on has been noted. This could have been al-ʿUzzā and Allāt, or just al-ʿUzzā, in the Meccan context.

Women went to war in litters and there are examples of women being transported in litters which in many ways resemble the qubbas in which the idols were kept. From the muʿallaqāt it is known that the litters were usually red. Zuhayr described the howdahs of the women passing al-Kanan as follows⁶⁹²;

Their howdahs hung with costly cloths and fine spun veils,
Whose fringes are the very red of dragon's blood⁶⁹³.

To which can be added;

And tassels of scarlet wool in the spots where they gat them down
Glowed like 'ishriq seeds, fresh fallen, unbroken, bright⁶⁹⁴

⁶⁹⁰ Agh.12/ 55.

⁶⁹¹ Al-Ṭabarī *Ta'rikh* I p1468 (vol. 8 p11 translation by Fishbein).

⁶⁹² Zuhayr's muʿallaqa deals with the War of Dahis, named after the horse which was at the root of the feud. It is said to have lasted for forty years, the same duration as the War of al-Baṣūṣ. Caussen de Perceval dates it at 568/570 CE - 608/610CE, though Lyall thinks this may be rather late (p116).

⁶⁹³ Arberry translation from *The Seven Odes*. The Lyall translation is; "Their litters hung with precious stuffs and thin veils thereon cast loosely, their borders rose, as though dyed in blood" (*Ancient Arabian Poetry* p111).

⁶⁹⁴ Lyall, p111.

From Labīd ;

And they hid themselves in the curtained howdahs with creaking tents,
Each litter well upholstered, its pole overshadowed by
A brocaded hanging with fine veil and crimson overlay.

These two descriptions are both from the sixth century. Labīd is said to have lived to be 150 years old, was alive in the time of Muḥammad and died a Muslim. Therefore the transportation of women in these richly ornamented vehicles was still a known practice by the time of Islam. The howdah of ʿĀ'isha from the Battle of the Camel appears to have more than a passing resemblance to the two described above. It is not described in great detail in al-Ṭabarī, only that it was a red howdah on a red camel, which was so covered with arrows that it resembled a hedgehog⁶⁹⁵. A more detailed description is found elsewhere, in which it was described as made of wood covered with iron armour, then green silk and overlaid with red leather⁶⁹⁶. If the tents of the tribes were now usually made of goat hair or some other such comparatively cheap material, then for the howdahs of these women to be constructed out of costly fabrics and rich decoration seems to suggest that they are not ordinary litters. Also, that these were red only adds to the idea that they were in some way seen as special as the qubbas were usually of the same colour.

An examination of the text gleans more detail about these howdahs. The riders are not usually referred to as women. Indeed, in al-Tibrizī's commentary, he notes that the *tha'in* are not called that until they are in the howdah and the howdah cannot be given the designation *tha'ina* until there is a woman in it⁶⁹⁷. This

⁶⁹⁵ Al-Ṭabarī *Ta'rikh* I p3216 (vol.16 p156 translation by Brockett).

⁶⁹⁶ Al-Mufīd, *Muṣnafāt*, p377.

⁶⁹⁷ Al-Tibrizī, p55. The women of Quraysh who went to Uḥud in their litters were also referred to by this term in the Arabic text (Ibn Hishām vol.3 p62, p371 in translation).

is comparable to the *ʿuṭfa* of the Rwala Bedouin, as there was some confusion as to whether the girl or the vehicle was actually the *ʿuṭfa*.

So intimately associated with women were litters, that one Arab warrior was mistaken for a woman by his choice to ride in one. At the Battle of Ḥunayn Durayd b. al- Ṣimmaḥ rode in a howdah⁶⁹⁸. After the battle when the polytheists were defeated, he was making his escape when his camel was overtaken by a Muslim warrior, Rabīʿa b. Rufay b. Uhban who was known as ibn Ladh'ah. Rabīʿa had assumed that it was a woman escaping because he saw a howdah⁶⁹⁹.

While the howdah described by Zuhayr in the *muʿallaqa* referred to earlier is not necessarily involved in any battle scene, although he does note the presence of both enemies and friends nearby, the howdah of Labīd's women do appear to have been in a conflict situation. He noted how the women had stirred the passions of the men on that day when they climbed into their howdahs. This may be interpreted as the women climbing into their litters preparing to do battle. It seems possible, given that Labīd is noting a particular day. While the tribes may have been simply moving camp and thus the women had to get into their vehicle for the journey, indeed in the lines immediately preceding these the striking of a camp is described, it seems unlikely that the passions of the men would have been stirred by the simple action of getting into a litter for travel, especially when one of the known and undisputed functions of the women was to arouse the fighting spirit of their warriors.

⁶⁹⁸ Ibn Hishām vol.4 p438 (p566 in translation) Al-Ṭabarī *Ta'rikh* I p1656 (vol. 9 p4 translation by Poonawala).

⁶⁹⁹ Al-Ṭabarī *Ta'rikh* I p1666 (vol. 9 p16 translation by Poonawala). The account given in al-Ṭabarī of the death of Durayd is based on that given in Ibn Hishām vol.4 p453 (p574 in translation). Durayd was killed by the Muslim warrior in spite of Durayd's claim to have often protected the women of Rabīʿa's tribe. See above, chapter three.

These litters are found through history in a nominally islamised form. Two of the most notable incidents involving litters from the early period of the Islamic community both involve ʿĀ'isha bint Abū Bakr. The first occurred when Muḥammad was still alive, and was the incident which has become known as the Affair of the Lie⁷⁰⁰, the second after his death during the caliphate of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, when she joined the rebellion against him and was present at the famous battle of the Camel in her litter⁷⁰¹.

Both of these events have implications for the symbolism of women in battle. In the first case of the Affair of the Lie it is the act of taking her on the raid which is of significance. As ʿĀ'isha said, Muḥammad used to always take one of his wives with him on his expeditions, and he allowed them to draw lots amongst themselves to decide which one should come. This action suggests something of the significance of the raids for the Muslim community. It was proposed earlier that there were two quite distinct types of battle, that is, a type of attack which was a raid with no greater aim than the capture of booty which was classed as a relatively unimportant event in symbolic terms in spite of its economic significance and another type of battle in which the honour and reputation of the tribe were in some way at stake. On this second battle some representation of tribal honour would be taken, and it would appear that Muḥammad had elevated his raids on other tribes to an event of quasi-religious status by the presence of one of his wives.

The presence of one of Muḥammad's wives would also act to encourage the men to bravery in their fighting as the defence of the women of the tribe was as stated earlier just as strong a feature of early Islamic practice as it was for their non-

⁷⁰⁰ For a full description of these events see chapter three.

⁷⁰¹ For a full description of these events see chapter three.

Muslim counterparts. Here perhaps ʿĀ'isha is also seen in a forerunner of her later role at the battle of the Camel.

The battle of the Camel took place in 656 CE / 36 AH. In the traditional version of the text, ʿĀ'isha was present in the thick of the fighting in her red armoured litter, as described above, but was unseen⁷⁰². Only her voice could be heard shouting encouragement to her supporters. An interesting alternative version of al-Ṭabarī's text based on a Persian translation suggests even further that ʿĀ'isha was acting in a manner concordant with the non-Muslim women in war. After the battle was over and ʿAlī handed ʿĀ'isha into the custody of her brother, Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr, he put his hand into the tent of ʿĀ'isha and touched her bare breast, incurring her wrath⁷⁰³. The Arabic version of this event does describe Aʿyan b. Ḍubayʿah al-Mujāshīʿī looking down into the howdah when it was removed from the camel and she was being carried away within it⁷⁰⁴. He looked down and in response to her request that he go away, he replied that he could see *ḥumayrāʾ*, or little red one. ʿĀ'isha was furious with him and cursed him soundly⁷⁰⁵. Thus here there is no mention of her brother, nor that she was naked, although it may be assumed that if ʿĀ'isha saw someone looking down at her, had she been modestly dressed she may not have reacted as she did, and Aʿyan may not have uttered the disrespectful words he did. Also, as she was referred to as the little red one, a term of endearment used

⁷⁰² Al-Ṭabarī *Taʾrīkh* I p3215-17 (vol.16 p155-7 translation by Brockett).

⁷⁰³ Zotenberg's translation of al-Ṭabarī's *Taʾrīkh*, part iv, chapter xcvi p661.

⁷⁰⁴ Aʿyan was of the Banū Tamīm and a friend of ʿAlī's (footnote to Brockett's translation, vol.16 p157 ff.1015).

⁷⁰⁵ Al-Ṭabarī *Taʾrīkh* I p3217 (vol.16p157 translation by Brockett). She cried " May Allah disgrace you!" according to Brockett's translation, though he discussed this curse in the footnotes in which he defined it more accurately as meaning "may Allah rip down your curtain" i.e. expose the women of your family. This may add to the idea that ʿĀ'isha was not wearing her hijāb inside the howdah and thus was exposed more than was customary. This incident is also noted in al-Balādhūrī, *Ansāb al-Ashraf*, vol.2 p250.

by Muḥammad, it may be speculated that she was dressed immodestly, i.e. in a way that only Muḥammad may have seen her⁷⁰⁶. Thus the two accounts agree only that a person disturbed ʿĀ'isha in some way in her howdah and were rebuked.

Morgenstern observes regarding this version, that it was omitted from the Arabic account for what he describes as 'obvious theological considerations'. It may be imagined that a Sunnī audience would have been more content to read a version which did not contain such an anecdote, whereas one assumes the Persian text might have been more likely to have been read by a Shi'ite audience who on the whole have a considerably less high regard for ʿĀ'isha than their Sunnī coreligionists. This version of the text suggests that ʿĀ'isha was behaving in precisely the same way that her predecessors described in chapter three would have done in disrobing herself in battle. Islamic modesty meant that this disrobing took place in seclusion, but nonetheless she did perform this part of the ritual in accordance with the apparent tradition of the Arabs.

The use of the ceremonial litter does not appear to have died out with the spread of Islam as modern descriptions of such litters exist. The majority of descriptions come from the Rwala Bedouin of Syria as they are one of the few tribes to have retained the use of the litter until this century and also as they have been the subject of much study by Western scholars.

Jaussen's famous description is actually of the litter of the Banū Sa'adan. He noted that this tribe had preserved their *merkab*, which was kept in the tent of the sheikh. He described it as a structure on the back of a camel 5m long, a metre wide and 1.5m high. It is richly decorated with ostrich feathers and other decorations,

⁷⁰⁶ Brockett noted this nickname in his translation (vol. 16 p157 ff1016). It is also said that Muḥammad called her this when he said that Muslims should take half of their religion from her.

and when the litter is taken into battle the daughter of the sheikh sits in it, dressed as a bride in ornate costume with jewellery and ostrich feathers with her long hair loose over her shoulders⁷⁰⁷. One of the earliest modern descriptions of the 'uṭfa dates from 1883 and was written by Rogers;

the sheikhs of the 'Anazy tribes say that in ancient times every tribe had its 'Atfah [sic.], . . . and was only made use of on occasions of unusually serious importance. When a tribe went to war with a powerful opponent the 'Atfah was placed on a strong and handsome camel and was gaily and gorgeously decorated with ostrich feathers, carpets and embroidery work, was surrounded by the bravest men of the tribe. In some tribes it was customary for a virgin, the daughter of one of the sheikhs to take her seat under the canopy and by her singing incite the men to acts of bravery⁷⁰⁸.

Rogers does not say specifically that the 'uṭfa he described belonged to the Rwala, but he does observe that they were known to Syrian desert tribes of which the Rwala were one. It is interesting that he notes that it was known that all the tribes once had 'uṭfas, which may indicate that the term itself was not specific to the Rwala alone but was an alternative name for such an object which defined its purpose clearly. The most recent definite description of the Rwala 'uṭfa is from Jabbur, based on a visit to the Rwala Bedouin in 1951⁷⁰⁹. His description of it is as follows;

⁷⁰⁷ Jaussen, *Coutumes du Pays Moab*, p174. The tribe referred to their litter specifically as a *dolla*.

⁷⁰⁸ Morgenstern p10, quoting Rogers, from The Academy of March 1883, 221 f.

⁷⁰⁹ Jabbur, "Abū al-Duhūr, Ruwala Uṭfah" *Studies in Honour of Philip Hitti* p195. Jabbur's description is the most recent one. The earliest published description is from 1881 by Oliphant in *The Land of Gilead* who noted that all the tribes once had these litters but now only the Rwala retain it;

composed of ostrich feathers; and before the tribe goes to war the most lovely girl in it is selected, and placed, in the lightest possible attire, in the cradle, which is then out on the back of a camel. The silken string by which the camel is led is then placed in her hand, and the warriors of the tribe pass before her. Whoever she selects as the leader of the camel becomes the leader of the host, which she accompanies, and is a prominent figure in the battles

Oliphant's description, apart from confirming the statements made by others and corroborating their descriptions of the object and the fact that there was a girl inside it also describes the ritual by which the girl chose who was to lead her camel. This is not mentioned in any other sources, but it is worthy of note, given that in pre-Islamic times the woman was in charge of her own beast and the first known instance of the camel having a male escort was at the Battle of the Camel under 'Ā'isha. The ritual appears to almost show the young woman choosing a champion in a chivalrous fashion which might seem more at home in medieval Europe than 19th century Syria. This is not to suggest that Oliphant

the litter is a wooden frame structure shaped like a cradle made up of poles joined at the top and bottom and in some places near the centre. It measures about two metres in height (including the saddle to which it is fastened), about two metres and three-quarters in length and seventy centimetres in width at the bottom. It is ornamented with black ostrich feathers and is spacious enough to hold two or three persons. However, when it is occupied, it is only occupied by one person, a female, and only when the tribe is in danger and the enemy very near. The female must be a virgin of the family of the chief, either his daughter or nearest maiden of his kin. She sits in the litter with her hair loosened and shouts war cries inciting the warriors to fight bravely⁷¹⁰

This description of the modern Rwala litter is not unlike the litter of the Banū Sa'adan described by Jaussen. The most notable difference between the litters described above in modern times and those of the pre-Islamic period, is that the modern litters appear from their descriptions to be less ornate, with no hangings or tent-like structures and also they are black rather than red. This may be due to the difference in materials available for decoration but nonetheless it is a significant variation.

The use of the colour red in the earlier litters of which there are descriptions is notable as it appears that they were all that colour. This is of course highly significant given that the qubbas were originally constructed of red leather. Beyond this, it is not known why red was chosen as the colour of importance. The ḥadīth do not appear to give any suggestions, other than some suggest Muḥammad disliked the colour red, for example, his wife Zaynab dyed some clothing red and when Muḥammad saw it he expressed dislike and so she washed the colour out again⁷¹¹. Also, Rafī' b. Khadij related that he went out on an expedition with Muḥammad, and their saddles and camel garments were red. Muḥammad is supposed to have remarked on this, "do I not see that red colour has dominated you" at which they

fabricated this ritual, even though it is not one which is mentioned by any other writer, as it was known that the woman could have a male escort.

⁷¹⁰ Jabbur, "Abū Al-Duhūr, the Ruwalah 'Utfah" *Studies in Honour of P.K.Hitti* p195.

⁷¹¹ Abū Dā'ūd Kitāb al-Adab no. 4060 p1136.

immediately jumped off their beasts and removed the garments from them⁷¹².

However, there is also a tradition which describes Muḥammad wearing a red cloak to perform prayers, in which he is described coming out of a qubba wearing a red cloak and performing two rakat using Bilāl's spear as an anza⁷¹³. This may perhaps suggest that Muḥammad did not dislike the colour red in itself, but may have viewed it as a colour which should not be worn by anybody, perhaps suggesting that the colour held some significance and thus he could wear it because he was a prophet. In contradiction with this view expressed in the ḥadīth is the fact that Muḥammad allegedly told his followers to take part of their religion from ʿĀ'isha, "the red-painted one"⁷¹⁴. This was said to be in reference to the colour of her face, but it still seems that if Muḥammad had an aversion to this colour, and indeed it was alleged that he even referred to it as the colour of Satan, then it would be odd to refer to his beloved wife as being of that colour. This perhaps adds to the idea that Muḥammad saw the colour red as being of religious significance and only to be worn by those of spiritual significance.

Another quite recent example of such litters appears to be found in the work of Saad Abdullah Sowayan on Nabati Poetry⁷¹⁵. It can only be said to appear to be recent as he does not give a date for the events he describes. Though his work was published in 1985 it may be that his examples are much older⁷¹⁶. In his example, he notes that when one tribe wants to occupy the land of another the sheikh would lead

⁷¹² Abū Dā'ūd Kitāb al-Adab no. 4059 p1136.

⁷¹³ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, vol. i, book of Salāt, chapter 17 no. 373.

⁷¹⁴ Salahuddin, "The Role of Women in the Scientific Movement" p5.

⁷¹⁵ Sowayan p36-37.

⁷¹⁶ The two examples he cites are from Doughty, *Travels in Arabia Deserta and Musil*. While he does quote directly from both at times, he does not state if all the material is of that age and therefore may not be still the case or if the practice had been retained until the time of writing.

his people with their herds into the territory and the opposing camps would pitch their *buyūt al-ḥarb*, or war tents there to prepare for a major battle. He also describes a richly decorated litter in which a noble young woman sits who "warbles the battlenote, with a passionate sweetness, which kindles the manly hearts of the young tribesmen"⁷¹⁷. His name for this litter is the "itfah" which may be assumed to be a variant spelling or pronunciation of ʿuṭfa. The litter was always the focal point of any conflict and in addition to the she-camel bearing the ʿuṭfa itself, there would be a company of women also on camels who rebuked any warrior who tried to retreat.

Alois Musil lived among the Rwala Bedouin in the early part of this century, and his first published description of the ʿuṭfa of the Rwala appeared in 1910⁷¹⁸;

The Ruwala [sic.] have a structure made out of thin wooden boards, decorated with ostrich feathers, which is fastened upon the baggage saddle of a camel. It is called *abu zhur al-markab*. Only the Ruwala possess this. No other tribe has anything like it. As they believe, the abu zhur [sic.] comes from Ruweil (the eponymous ancestor of the Ruwala) and is called abu zhur (pater aeterni saeculi) because it is passed on from generation to generation through the ages. . . (w)hoever has it in his possession is prince of all these tribes and they are obliged to follow him in battle. Every year a white camel is sacrificed before it, with the words, 'This is thy sacrifice, O Abu Zhur!' and its blood is sprinkled on the corner posts of the structure.

The description of the ʿuṭfa from Musil is of great value. It describes how the Rwala actually perceived the object, and the fact that they made sacrifices to it, or, it may be suggested, to the deity which resided in it. This description would seem to clearly demonstrate that the way in which the Rwala viewed the ʿuṭfa is akin to that of the Israelites to the Ark, or indeed any other ancient Semitic society seems to

⁷¹⁷ Sowayan p36. This quote is stated to have come from Doughty's travels in Arabia Deserta, though Sowayan does not state whether the whole description is from Doughty or only that part.

⁷¹⁸ Die Kultur XI 1910, quoted here from Morgenstern, p5-6.

have viewed their tented bethels. The sacrifice of the camel and the daubing of the blood seems to be rather like the Pesach ritual and may be suggested was a prophylactic measure in a similar way.

The religious status accorded the ʿuṭfa by the Rwala is noted by Jabbur who wrote that they

believe that there is something divine about Abū-al-Duhūr. It helps them and protects them and they in turn guard and protect it. They think that Allah at certain times abides in it. This is how they explain the fluttering of the ostrich feathers in a calm moment or the rocking of the litter during the heat of a fight. A Ruwayli frequently swears by Abū-al-Duhūr just as he swears by God or by the Prophet Muḥammad. On the day of the Adha feast a litter is generally sprinkled with the blood of the camel⁷¹⁹.

This statement almost entirely echoes Musil's much earlier description of the spiritual significance of the litter, although he includes the detail of how the movement of the litter may be interpreted,

in this Abu zhur Allah takes pleasure in abiding and imparts directions to the tribes through external signs. Ofttimes the ostrich-feathers are supposed to tremble, although there may be no wind. Ofttimes the structure is believed to bow itself unceasingly to the right. This signifies *kudrat min Allah*, 'the power of God'⁷²⁰.

This demonstrates that the Rwala had an idea that the ʿuṭfa was more than a focus for the warriors. It seems clear that an idea survived that the litter was a religious object, though due to centuries of exposure to Islam the deity associated with the litter was obviously Allah rather than an earlier deity which was likely to have been the original resident of the ʿuṭfa. Morgenstern found the "points of similarity and manifest relationship between this strange object and the various Biblical traditions almost startling", noting the oracles, the presence of the object at decisive battles of

⁷¹⁹ Jabbur, "Abū Al-Duhūr, the Ruwalah 'Uṭfah" p198.

⁷²⁰ Morgenstern, p6, quoting Musil.

the tribe and how it is believed to be the bringer of victory⁷²¹. The name of the object Abū al-Duhūr has been translated as father of ages, which Musil took to mean that it was an object of great antiquity and that is the origin of the name. Curtiss however, put forward the suggestion that the name was in fact that of the deity itself, based on some verses recorded from a tribesman of the Rwala;

Abu ed-Duhur will come unfailingly,
To help those who put on their equipment for war;
And through him their horses become fear - inspiring⁷²².

Thus Abū ad-Duhūr was performing the function which would have been entirely within the scope of a tribal deity who gave victory in war. Under the joint influences of time and Islam this has been forgotten and only the name remains.

The Islamisation of the litter which has taken place appears to have been a simple substitution of one deity for another rather than an abandonment of the tradition altogether. The actual institution appears to have changed remarkably little over the centuries, there was still a richly decorated litter in which a noble young woman of the tribe would ride in a conflict situation, she was still attended to by other young women and defended by the warriors. Al-Tibrīzī also observed that it was inside this *thā'ina* that the women, and he noted specifically the young noble girl, would sit⁷²³.

The capture of the litter would mean the loss of the battle. Unfortunately Jabbur does not record the types of battle cry which may have been used by the young woman in order to determine any possible survivals in these verse.

This is one aspect of war practice which appears to have continued into Islam more or less unchanged. In these tribes it is seen as an ancient custom, the origins of

⁷²¹ Morgenstern p6.

⁷²² Curtiss, quoted in Morgenstern p7.

⁷²³ Al-Tibrizī p55.

which appear to have become mythological. Obviously under Islam any ideas of pagan practices would have been replaced by an Islamic explanation.

It remains uncertain exactly how old this tradition was. It cannot be said with certainty when this became part of the Arab way of war, assuming that it was not an indigenous practice. This uncertainty lies partly with the problem of sources, and that little material remains from the Arabs themselves to inform one on this matter. It can also be said that while women appear in litters of a correct type in the poetry of late antiquity Arabia as demonstrated above, further back than that it cannot be stated with certainty that this practice was followed.

The terracottas of Caussen's archaeological researches in Syria which were discussed above in chapter five indeed show female figures underneath a tented structure on camelback. However, as discussed earlier, these representations are more likely to be of deities than of actual women themselves, and some remains also show the figures being attended to in the way the gods would have been. It has been noted that camel-back processions were often religious occasions in themselves, and that Muḥammad and some groups of women used to perform the ritual of ṭawāf on a camel, indeed the word used in the verse for to walk was that which is commonly taken as a term for the walking involved in ṭawāf⁷²⁴, it has been suggested that Muḥammad would actually preach from on top of a camel⁷²⁵. If the individuals who performed rites whilst seated on the camel, perhaps even within a qubba or later equivalent, were considered to be cult personnel, then it may also be the case that the women who said that they rode upon the camel saddles may have been announcing that they were kāhināt and were preaching messages from their deity or

⁷²⁴ Haldar, p191, quoting Wensinck p44.

⁷²⁵ Lammens p122, no source given.

spirit. In the story of Zarqa' al -Yamāmah, the kâhina of the legendary story of the Ṭaşm and the Jadis, she was supposed to have said, " Carry me standing upon the camel"⁷²⁶. Also Salma bint Mālik, the leader of the rebel Fazāra tribe, is described by al-Ṭabarī as going into battle against the Muslims riding her mother's own camel. Nowhere in the historical account of Salma is she accorded the status of a kâhina, or indeed that of any other cult official, she is not even described as a poet which might have suggested that she was involved in a cult. Regarding her behaviour when she led her rebellion, it may have been that she was mimicking a practice which she had seen other women do in battle, perhaps even her own mother. That is, she was aware that it was customary for women of nobility to be present at battles upon a camel. She may have been aware of this tradition as it seems that such practices existed in her lifetime. The potential significance of her riding a camel could be dismissed as being a logical way for her to have travelled to her people and be present in battle. This may not perhaps be the whole truth. It is stated quite pointedly in the text that she rode her mother's own camel. This suggests that her method of travel was in some way significant. Of course, it seems unlikely that it was really her mother's own camel, as her mother had been dead for some time, and therefore how anyone would have known it was her mother's camel is not stated. Perhaps what is more likely, is that this was a metaphor used to describe that fact that Salma was here behaving in the way that her mother would have done, perhaps as in English one might say that someone stepped into the shoes of another or followed in the footsteps of someone else.

⁷²⁶ Al-Ṭabarī *Ta'riḫ* I p775 (vol.4 p154 translated by Perlmann).

The Banāt Ṭāriq.

The Banāt Ṭāriq appear, from the remaining textual evidence, to have been a group of women who accompanied the men into battle. It is quite probable that they were present in order to encourage the men in the traditional role described in chapter three. It is however their religious function which will form the focus of this discussion.

Nabia Abbott alluded in her article "Women and the State on the Eve of Islam" to an institution which she called the Cult of the Lady of Victory. As Abbott gave no textual reference for this name, nor has any been seen in a source text, it may be assumed that she coined the term herself. She did provide a very precise definition of its function;

the sacred group, within sight and sound of the warriors, if not indeed in the actual fight from the start, urged and excited the men with their stirring war songs sung to the accompaniment of their lutes. The leader of the group was the lady of victory herself, who, with hair flowing and body partly exposed, embodied and appealed to valour, honour and passion⁷²⁷.

Abbott's description appears at first glance not to contain anything exceptional. The function of women as cheerleaders for their men has been documented above in chapter three. However, Abbott makes some points which indicate that something more was going on here than simply turning out to support the men. Firstly, she describes the group as sacred, though how she deduced that the group was sacred she does not say. Secondly, she describes an actual leader of the group. This implies that it was more than simply a band of women of the tribe who randomly appeared, rather that it was an organised institution with a specific person at the helm. This leader was in charge of the group and probably had some ceremonial function.

⁷²⁷ Abbott, "Women and the State on the Eve of Islam", *AJSL* 41 (1963)p263. Unfortunately Abbott does not give a reference for where she got this description, whether it was from one source or a composite of several descriptions, nor indeed does she state where the name 'cult of the lady of victory' came from. Therefore it must be assumed that the name was her own, although it appears that her ideas about such a group and its potential religious significance were correct.

Abbott specifically describes her behaviour, which may suggest that the other women around her functioned in support of her and did not have the same symbolism as she herself had. It seems a likely hypothesis that the group described by Abbott are the Banāt Ṭāriq, as will be shown.

The Banāt Ṭāriq are not described in any detail in the Arabic texts. Indeed, this name is not one given to them by any historian, rather it is the one by which they appear to have called themselves in the surviving verse recited by the women. There are several examples of these women reciting verse which are identical or virtually so. The majority are attributed to Hind bint ‘Utba from the battle of Uḥud, although this is not always the case as will be shown below.

The longest version is that found given by Ibn Manẓūr in Lisān al-‘Arab, and is as follows⁷²⁸:

We are the daughters of the morning star,	<i>naḥnu banāt ṭāriq</i>
We move upon the soft cushions on the camel saddles,	<i>namshī ‘alā al-namāriq</i>
There is perfume in the separation,	<i>al-Mask fī al- Mafāriq</i>
If you advance we embrace you,	<i>in tuqbilū na‘āmiq</i>
If you retreat we distance ourselves from you,	<i>aw tadbirū nufāriq</i>
A separation with no love.	<i>farāq ghayr wāmiq</i>

These verses appear usually in a shorter form in the versions given in the source texts, and the lines usually omitted are the second, fourth and fifth. Al-Wāqidī⁷²⁹ and al-Isfahānī⁷³⁰ both give this rendering:

We are the daughters of the morning star,
We move upon the soft cushions upon the camel saddles,

⁷²⁸ Lisān al-‘Arab, ṭ-r-q.

⁷²⁹ Al-Wāqidī vol.2 p225. These verses were recited by Hind bint ‘Utba and the women who were with her at Uḥud.

⁷³⁰ Agh. 11/46. He states that these verse were recited by Hind bint ‘Utba at Uḥud.

If you advance we embrace you
 If you retreat we distance ourselves from you
 A separation with no love.

Another shorter version is also given by al-Isfahānī⁷³¹, and Ibn Manẓūr⁷³² :

We are the daughters of the Morning Star,
 We move upon the soft cushions on the camel saddles.

The deviation from the above is found in al-Ṭabarī in the account of the battle of Uḥud⁷³³:

We are the daughters of the morning star,	<i>naḥnu banāt ṭāriq</i>
If you advance we embrace you,	<i>in tuqbilū naʿāmiq</i>
Spread the soft cushions on the camel saddles	<i>wa nabaṣṣ al-namāriq</i>
If you retreat we distance ourselves from you	<i>aw tadbirū nafāriq</i>
A separation with no love	<i>farāq ghayr wāmiq</i>

The verses have been switched in order and also there is the insertion of a variant verse, "spread the soft cushions on the camel saddles".

This variation of that verse occurs in one other verse associated with Hind and her women at Uḥud which is given by Ibn Hishām as follows⁷³⁴:

If you advance we embrace you
 And spread camel saddles,
 If your retreat we distance ourselves from you
 A separation without love

⁷³¹ Agh. 11/46. This is given on the authority of ʿĀʾisha, though she gave no record of when or where she heard this verse recited. Given her behaviour at the Battle of the Camel, it may be speculated that if it was a normal piece of war verse she may have been familiar with it, or alternatively that she heard it at the battle of Uḥud at which she was present as a water-bearer as discussed in chapter three. See also Perron p49.

⁷³² Lisān al-ʿarab n-m-r-q.

⁷³³ al-Ṭabarī *Taʾrīkh* I p1397 (vol. 7 p116 translation by Watt and McDonald).

⁷³⁴ Ibn Hishām vol. 3 p68 (p374 in translation).

A slightly different version of the verse is found in the Persian text of al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rīkh*⁷³⁵;

We are the daughters of the Morning Star,
We walk upon cushions,
Our necks are adorned with pearls,
Our hair is perfumed with musk
If you fight we will embrace you in our arms
If you recoil we will stay away
Goodbye to love

These verses do not name the group as Banāt Ṭāriq. However, as the verses are virtually identical and claimed to have been spoken by the same people, it seems that it is the Ibn Hishām version of the verses which is in error in the omission of the first line.

All the versions of the verses given above were attributed to Hind bint ʿUtba and the women of Quraysh who were with her at the battle of Uḥud. This suggests that these verses were spoken only by them. However, there are two further examples of women speaking the same verses which are not attributed to her or indeed to anyone within the tribe of Quraysh. The first example is of Zaynab, a member of the Banū Mālik b. Kināna. The second deals with verses attributed to one of the daughters of Find al-Zammanī of the Banū Shaybān, which will be discussed in greater detail later.

All of the above examples of poetry fall into the category of verse referred to in Arabic as *taḥrīḍ* or call to valour. *Taḥrīḍ* appears to be either a sub-category of

⁷³⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, translation by Zotenberg, part 3 p28. This is an English translation of Zotenberg's French rendering.

ritha' (lament)⁷³⁶ or of *madiḥ* (panegyric)⁷³⁷. It could form a part of either⁷³⁸. The call to vengeance could be a natural conclusion to a lament on a dead male relative, obviously had they died in battle then the responsibility for blood-vengeance could have been expressed in poetry. Certainly if the *taḥrīd* poetry was a part of marathi then the association with women would be very strong, as there is evidence that the earliest marathi were uttered by women as part of funeral rituals. Certainly as lamentation seems to have an especially strong affinity with women poets then they would have been among the major composers of the genre.

The verses recited by the Banāt Ṭāriq appear to fit into the broad theme of the *taḥrīd*. There can be no doubt that the verses uttered by these women were of that type as they are clearly an incitement to fight bravely, along with a warning of what will happen should they fail.

The verse does not appear to be part of a larger poem. The general rendering of the verse is short. It seems to resemble a war-cry as much as a poem, but if the category of *taḥrīd* refers to any verse uttered in the cause of incitement to valour then it certainly is that. The existence of this verse challenges the assertion by McDonald that the Arabs had no unchangeable war-chant⁷³⁹. Although the Ibn Hishām poem is somewhat longer, it can definitely be seen as a *taḥrīd* poem.

Lammens observed that this poetry was very uniform in composition, and he attributes this to its quasi-religious character i.e. that as a performance of a ritual it

⁷³⁶ Stetkevych p.162.

⁷³⁷ Jones, p2.

⁷³⁸ The difference between *ritha'* and *madiḥ* poetry is subtle. Montgomery finds the difference between them to be that *ritha'* poetry reflects the level of grief to which the dead person is entitled, expressed in an exceptional way by the poet ("Dichotomy in Jāhili Poetry", *JAL* 17, 1986).

⁷³⁹ McDonald, "Orally Transmitted Poetry in Pre-Islamic Arabia" *JAL* 9 (1978) p18-19. He does note however that some verses were often recited before the commencement of hostilities with the aim of raising the morale of the warriors.

cannot vary too far from an established pattern⁷⁴⁰. All Arabic poetry tends to follow guidelines, though it does appear that the *taḥrīd* poetry perhaps offers the least opportunity for self-expression and artistic ability to come through⁷⁴¹. This may help explain why the examples of the verse recited by the members of the Banāt Tāriq are virtually identical in each case.

If the reason for the formulaic nature of the verse was that it was a religious liturgy, then this would better explain its uniformity than simply that women were not very gifted poets. The other example of religious verse which remains from the period is the *talbiyyāt* uttered at the shrines to the pagan deities. Ibn Ḥabīb devotes a chapter of *Kitāb al-Muḥabbar* to listing the *talbiyyāt* of the various deities, and while they obviously invoke different names, the style and format is quite rigid⁷⁴².

Translations of certain renderings of the verse recited by the women have previously appeared in English, and they should be commented upon. The first question raised by the McDonald and Watt translation of the verse as it appears in al-

⁷⁴⁰ Stetkevych p162.

⁷⁴¹ Stetkevych, p162. Her own explanation for the limitations of the genre is that it reflected "not the inherent biological limitations of gender but the limited participation allowed or demanded of women in the public life of the tribe" (p162). In this assessment she is incorrect. The limitations of the genre are entirely consistent with the limitations of all Arabic poetry which is almost always in this period formulaic, even when at its most spontaneous. In addition to this Stetkevych restates a misconception she displays throughout the fifth chapter of the book concerning women's verse, namely that women in early Arab history were secluded and participated little in the daily life of the tribe or the town in which they lived. There is a large amount of evidence to the contrary, as was considered in chapter two. Her constant insistence that the metaphors imply seclusion, chastity and an imperative to avoid defilement at the hands of the enemy are real, and indeed she notes that at puberty girls underwent a period of seclusion - this is stated in Arabic sources regarding the *Dār al-Nadwa*. Her belief that this is the beginning of a period of *purdah* lasting her entire life is incorrect. Women did remain chaste until marriage, and unregulated relations were certainly not permitted. Also, capture in battle and potential violation are themes in poetry and the protection of women from this fate is a strong component of the code of honour of the Arab warrior at this time. However, none of these in fact suggest the occultation taken as constant by Stetkevych. From this belief that women had no life outside the domestic sphere she constructs interpretations of verse which, in the light of the comparative lack of seclusion of the women of the period are inherently flawed.

⁷⁴² See also MJ Kister "Labbayaka allāhuma labbayaka" *JSAI* 2(1980) which discusses the *talbiyyāt* and the possible signs of monotheism in them.

Ṭabarī is the accuracy of translating ṭāriq as morning star, as they here preferred to translate it as the name Ṭāriq. It would seem from the formula Banāt Ṭāriq that they were the daughters of Ṭāriq, and that as such were associated with a person of that name. The suggestion that the verse was recited by Hind, daughter of Ṭāriq b. Bayāda of Iyād during the War of the Fars is the explanation proposed by al-Rawd al-Unuf⁷⁴³ and also Ibn Manzur gives this in Lisān al-ʿarab, although he does not favour it⁷⁴⁴.

There are a number of points which would appear to suggest that this association of these women with a person called Ṭāriq is not correct. First of all, there is no person by the name of Ṭāriq in the lineage of the Quraysh, and it is known that the women of Quraysh associated themselves with this group. Therefore the suggestion that it might refer to a tribal ancestor seems unlikely. As this group could be found in different tribes, albeit that it seems many of these tribes were allies, it cannot refer to such a person. It may also be suggested that there was a tribal ancestor from another tribe who invented this war cry, but that too seems unlikely. Why one tribe would adopt an institution of another along with the irrelevant name of a member of that tribe seems rather suspect.

A more likely translation is "daughters of the morning star"⁷⁴⁵. To support the idea that Ṭāriq here refers to the Morning Star and not to a person of that name, is a note in Kitāb al-Aghānī, where Muḥammad himself announced that it meant a

⁷⁴³ This explanation is found in a footnote to the verses in al-Wāqidi, vol.1 p225. The explanation is weak, based on an unattributed report from an unnamed source.

⁷⁴⁴ Lisān al-ʿarab, ṭ-r-q.

⁷⁴⁵ As noted in the preceding chapter, Ṭāriq does mean morning star, and this is the interpretation of the word favoured Ibn Manẓūr and by modern commentators, i.e. Fahd and Haldar, although their analysis of the material was fundamentally flawed, as will be demonstrated.

star⁷⁴⁶. The association of this institution with the morning star would appear to be more reasonable given that this would make aspects of the activities of this group more explicable on a religious basis as will be discussed later in this chapter.

The lack of the definite article in the construction of the phrase may not mean that it cannot mean daughters of the Morning Star. This omission of the definite article may exist for reasons of 'poetic licence' and has been omitted to make it fit into the chanting. This is not unknown in poetry. For example, the grandson of Muḥammad was known as al-Ḥusayn, but often in poetry this is reduced to Ḥusayn⁷⁴⁷. His name can appear with and without the definite article in the same poem, therefore it seems to be simply a matter of poetic adaptation to fit the rhythm of the poem. Poetry often plays with word order and grammar so there is no reason why it may not have done so here. Al-ʿUzzā was also referred to by al-Ṭabarī as simply ʿUzzā on one occasion⁷⁴⁸.

The phrase *namshī ʿalā al-namāriq*, which has been translated as "we walk upon soft-pillows"⁷⁴⁹ may perhaps be better translated as "we move upon the soft cushions on the camel saddles".

Firstly, the verb *mashā*, which has been translated as to move, but in this context may be translated as to ride. If these women were indeed going into battle, either on camels or seated inside litters, the verb would be more sensibly translated as such, especially when one considers an alternative meaning for the word translated above as 'soft pillows'. The word *namāriq* occurs in all the verses, and is usually translated as soft pillows or cushions. However the word can mean camel

⁷⁴⁶ Agh.11/ 146. In addition to this reference, in other volumes of *tafsīr* Muḥammad is attributed with the same statement (see chapter five for discussion of sūra al-Ṭāriq).

⁷⁴⁷ For example al-Ṭabarī *Taʾrīkh* II p340-1 (vol. 19 p135 translation by Howard).

⁷⁴⁸ al-Ṭabarī *Taʾrīkh* I p1418 (vol.7 p131 translation by McDonald and Watt).

⁷⁴⁹ Halдар, p. 191, al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, translation by Watt and McDonald, vol.7 p135.

saddles⁷⁵⁰. This may appear to alter the meaning very little, as what difference does it make what the women were moving upon. In fact, it could be of great significance indeed. The women stated that they would ride upon camel saddles, which could refer to them being on camel back. This suggests images of ʿĀ'isha at the Battle of the Camel and the numerous women seated in their howdahs in Bedouin warfare. It is possible that it may mean pillows or cushions and still not detract from the implication that the women were on a camel, as the word *namāriq*, according to Ibn Manẓūr can mean small, soft cushions which can be placed upon the saddle of the camel. If it was taken that these camel saddles were especially fine and softly padded, it adds to the image of these saddles as comparatively ornate and special, which lends itself well to the previously discussed idea of the ceremonial litter.

Another aspect of the verses recited is the idea that the men would be rewarded for their bravery. In all the verses it is stated that if the men advanced they would be embraced and if they retreated they would turn away from them and leave them unloved. This would appear to indicate that the women were encouraging their men to be more brave in fighting, and doubtless it had the desired effect. In an earlier example of the women telling their men what would happen if they let them down, the women told their men that failure would mean that they would no longer be their husbands. This would seem to be the same threat as the women of the Banāt Ṭāriq were able to make to the men of the tribe.

Here too it be that the women were aware of the pre-battle oaths which may have been taken by the men and therefore the promise of warm embraces, had they taken a vow of sexual abstinence, would have considerably more force. It may be

⁷⁵⁰ Lisān al-ʿArab, n-m-r-q.

stretching the point to suggest that there was some sort of post battle sexual rituals although that must remain as a possibility for some future consideration.

The best-documented example of the Banāt Ṭāriq is from the Battle of Uḥud. The battle was fought in 625 CE /3 AH between the Muslims, then based in Medina, and the polytheistic Meccans. This battle was seen by the Meccans as something of a rematch after the battle of Badr the year before at which they had sustained heavy losses. The need to regain honour after their defeat was great for the Meccans. That this was a major motivating factor is shown by Abū Sufyān reminding the warriors about the great defeat at Badr and instructing them not to let it happen again. The Meccans won and many prominent Muslims were killed.

The Banāt Ṭāriq appear to have been led by Hind bint ʿUtba, the wife of Abū Sufyān⁷⁵¹. Although she later was to become a Muslim, at this time she was firmly on the side of the polytheists. When the two opposing sides drew near to each other, Hind and the women who were with her, who are explicitly called Banāt Ṭāriq in al-Wāqidī's account, stood up and began to beat their tambourines while Hind recited the verse discussed above.

This depiction of their activity only shows how they may have been involved in the encouragement of the men in their fighting. It does not demonstrate that they may have had a religious role. However, there is evidence which indicate that they may indeed have been present in the service of the cult. Firstly, they called themselves the daughters of the morning star. As was also demonstrated in the previous chapter, the goddess al-ʿUzzā appears to have had an association with war, probably in conjunction with the goddess Allāt. That these women at war chose to identity themselves with this deity (or deities) then it may be suggested that they

⁷⁵¹ Hind bint ʿUtba and her marriages have been discussed in chapter two above.

were in the service of the cult. Confirming this, it is known that Allāt and al-ʿUzzā were present at Uḥud because they were brought there by Abū Sufyān, the husband of Hind bint ʿUtba, leader of the Banāt Ṭāriq ⁷⁵². Thus, the women are found identifying themselves with a deity of war, whose image is present during that very battle. This would suggest that these women and the cult were related. As these verses have been associated with women from other tribes, it is possible that the cult of the Morning Star was present among several tribes.

If it was the case that they were present in the service of the goddess, it must now be considered what form that service may have taken. The most obvious answer is that one of the women was acting as a *kāhina* and interpreting oracles for the warriors thought to be coming from the deities⁷⁵³. This function of cult intermediaries during warfare has already been discussed, and it may be noted that even today the ceremonial litters which are based on the qubba in which it may be assumed these goddesses were present, were believed to give portents of future events⁷⁵⁴.

Fahd claimed that the Banāt Ṭāriq were a religious order attached to the cult of Allāt⁷⁵⁵. The view that the Banāt Ṭāriq were in some way associated with Allāt seems to have originated with Haldar, as Fahd quotes his research. In Haldar's study the error in his belief was based on misreading a text⁷⁵⁶. He took as his evidence a phrase from Ibn Hishām, *al-nisā' allātī* which he translated as "the women

⁷⁵² Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh* I p1495 (vol.7 p114 Watt and McDonald, although their translation of this passage is incorrect).

⁷⁵³ This is an idea also suggested by Fahd but he gives no evidence for this belief (p99).

⁷⁵⁴ See above for the description of the *Rwala ʿuṭfa* in which its movements were thought to be showing the future.

⁷⁵⁵ Fahd, p99.

⁷⁵⁶ It may be noted that Haldar may not have read the original Arabic text himself, as he acknowledges the assistance of another in the reading of the Arabic.

belonging to Allāt⁷⁵⁷. However, he has lifted it out of context, as the full sentence reads, *qāmat Hind wa al-nisā' allātī ma'aha wā ...*, which means "and Hind bint 'Utba stood up with the women who were with her and . . ."⁷⁵⁸. The full sentence notwithstanding, the expression *al-nisā' allātī* cannot mean the women belonging to Allāt. What Haldar has taken as either a nisba or a name with a genitive ending, both of which in this case would also be incorrect, is in fact the feminine plural relative pronoun.

The error of Haldar's, and subsequently Fahd's interpretation of this verse is confirmed by the descriptions of the group in Kitāb al-Aghānī. Al-Isfahānī gives two slightly different versions of the sentence as follows: *banāt ṭāriq allātī yaqulna* and *banāt ṭāriq allawātī yaqulna*. While the first corresponds with the versions above, the second confirms that what is given here is the feminine plural relative pronoun as *allawātī* is the alternative to *allātī* and thus there is no possibility that the expression could mean anything other than "the daughters of the morning star who...".

Although it seems the explanation offered by Haldar to explain why he believes the women to be attached to Allāt is incorrect, it does not mean that Allāt was not a part of the morning star cult in some way, as has been demonstrated in chapter five.

It may also be possible that the group as a whole, or some of them, were there as guardians of the qubba. For this there is also precedent among the Arab tribes. For example, the two daughters of Find al-Zammanī appear to fit into this

⁷⁵⁷ Haldar, p192. Haldar also made an error when he described Hind as the wife of Abū Sufyān of the Banū 'Abd al-Dār. She was indeed married to Abū Sufyān but he was from the 'Abd Manāf.

⁷⁵⁸ Ibn Hishām vol.3 p67 (p374 in translation).

model of behaviour. Find was a poet of the Banū Shaybān, a sub-tribe of the Zammanis, a branch of the Bakr b. Rabī'a, which explains his presence in the battle between the Bakr and the Taghlib. It may be that he himself was there to compose stirring verse for the benefit of the warriors, though he was himself a great horseman and was there at the head of 70 cavalry in support of his tribe⁷⁵⁹. He took his two daughters, both of whom had an active part in the proceedings. The first daughter removed her clothes and began to chant the following verse to the Banū Shaybān ;

Wah wah wah wah, blazed up have the swift ones and the slow,
How excellent , how excellent you are on the morning when your heads are
shaven⁷⁶⁰

Her sister than followed her example, removing her clothing and she too begins to chant in verse;

If you advance we embrace you spreading out on the soft pillows
But if you retreat we abandon, and abandonment without any loving⁷⁶¹

Not only were these girls there as guardians of the qubba, but it may be that they identified themselves as part of the same religious group as the Banāt Ṭāriq, given the similarity in the verse recited by the second sister with that recited by the Qurayshī women at Uḥud.

⁷⁵⁹ Perron, p49, Agh. 20 , p144.

⁷⁶⁰ The morning on which your heads were shaven is a reference to the practice of the Bakr. B.Wā'il of shaving their heads before going to war. The shaving of the heads of the men has already been discussed in chapter two when noting the activities of the women of the Taghlib during the battles with the Bakr and the unfortunate consequences for one Bakrite tribesman. Also note the story of Labīd shaving his head which was given above in chapter four.

⁷⁶¹ Ag. 20/144 - compare to Ag. 11 /146.

So, it appears that at the Battle of Uḥud, the Banāt Ṭāriq were a group of women, one hesitates to suggest noble women, who at the commencement of the battle were present singing and playing musical instruments under the leadership of Hind bint ʿUtba. It has already been shown in an earlier chapter that the women of Quraysh, Hind in particular, appear to have been in the thick of the fighting, but this does not appear to have been a part of the activity of the Banāt Ṭāriq in general.

Music as a Part of the Ritual. Adding to the idea that the women were involved in some sort of ceremonial occasion are the descriptions of them playing tambourines and drums and singing. It seems that these activities were often associated with religious rituals and seem to be common features to all the descriptions of the activities of the women in battle whether they were explicitly referred to as Banāt Ṭāriq or not. It may be interesting to note here that music was part of the rituals associated with al-ʿUzzā at Petra⁷⁶².

Lammens observed that at the end of the pilgrimage at the sacrifice at Mina Medinan women played tambourines, but he does not say where this information came from⁷⁶³.

In a Biblical context it is known that women often were seen playing musical instruments, singing, dancing and so forth in celebration⁷⁶⁴. Miriam in particular

⁷⁶² Murray, p146.

⁷⁶³ Lammens p119.

⁷⁶⁴ For example, when Jephthah returns from a victory over the Ammonites, "behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances" (Judges 11:34), or when David returned from fighting the Philistines "the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing to meet King Saul, with timbrels, with songs of joy and with instruments of music" (1 Sam.18:6), and the celebration of the Israelite victory over the Assyrians, "all the women of Israel gathered to see her [Judith] and blessed her and some of them performed a dance for her" (Judith 15:12).

might here provide a useful comparison for the women of the Banāt Ṭāriq and the roles of the women at Uḥud and other battles.

Miriam is one of the five prophetesses mentioned in the Bible⁷⁶⁵. When the Israelites were given permission to leave Egypt by Pharaoh they were pursued to the Red Sea by Pharaoh's army after he changed his mind about giving them their freedom. After the miracle of the parting of the sea, Moses and the Israelites sang in praise of God, but it is specifically mentioned that Miriam the prophetess and sister of Moses and Aaron took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women followed her with their tambourines and they danced. Miriam is also said to have sung to them, "Sing to the Lord for he is highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea"⁷⁶⁶. The fact that the text tells this story specifically after it has already demonstrated the gratitude the Israelites felt by their singing in praise, it may be suggested that the ritual singing, dancing and music of Miriam and her women held a separate function in the community. It is in this comparison than one may propose some similarity existed between Miriam and her group and the Banāt Ṭāriq.

The brief but significant passages from the Hebrew Bible describing the efforts of the women in celebrating a victory are helpful in analysing the behaviour of the Arab women in the ayyām narratives. The specific ritual activity described above is of the women gathering after a victory over the enemy to sing in praise. There is some evidence to suggest that it was a long standing tradition that dancing,

⁷⁶⁵ There has been some question raised over whether Miriam was truly a prophetess in the full sense of the word given that at no point is she demonstrated foretelling future events, especially given that at that point in history the term prophet was less defined than it was to become latterly (Burns p3). This point is also agreed upon by Vos, though he adds, and this indeed would appear to be unarguable, that "with respect to Miriam it is possible that the term prophetess had a rather broad meaning indicating little more than that she was a leader (possibly a leader or teacher among women as Ex. 15:20 may suggest) in Israel and that no specific function is indicated by the word" (Vos, p183).

⁷⁶⁶ Exodus, 15:20-21 It has been suggested that the song of Miriam is in fact older than the song of praise sung by Moses and the men of Israel (Burns p13).

singing and the playing of musical instruments was a piece of religious ritual. As far back as Assyrian times music appears to have been seen as a weapon in the hands of the gods. The Assyrian epic of Tukulti- Ninurta describes Istar as a Divine Warrior in which she played her lyre in order to destroy the enemy⁷⁶⁷.

The role of women musicians in a ritual context is one which preceded the events above, for example in ancient Egypt temples there were groups of musician priestesses. Some of the first examples of these musician priestesses are from the Fourth Dynasty, when they are depicted on temple reliefs waiting to greet the king with hand-clapping and making music. It appears that in the earlier dynasties the women who played this role were usually noble, but by the New Kingdom it appears that in the case of the temple at Thebes almost any woman resident in the surrounding area might serve as a musician -priestess. The function of this was to keep evil away from the god-king and to prevent misfortune befalling the worshippers⁷⁶⁸.

The musician priestesses, while attached to the temples of many towns and therefore not exclusively in the service of any one deity, appear to have had a particular affinity with the goddess Hathor. She was the goddess of music and dancing⁷⁶⁹. The musician priestesses were indeed thought to be the goddess while they were performing their rituals, and were known as 'the Hathors' and the worshippers could approach them in supplication in the same way as they would the goddess⁷⁷⁰. It was discussed in the previous chapter that Hathor was an Egyptian

⁷⁶⁷ Burns, p35.

⁷⁶⁸ Blackman "On the Position of Women in the Ancient Egyptian Hierarchy", *JEA* 7 (1921).

⁷⁶⁹ Oesterley p60.

⁷⁷⁰ Her blessing could also be conferred by the musicians playing outside someone's house, Oesterley p61.

incarnation of the Semitic goddess Istar, who has already been established was a forerunner of Allāt and al-ʿUzzā.

The instrument particularly associated with Hathor was the sistra, although tambourines were also seen depicted with her musician priestesses and it would appear that the two instruments are not unlike.

Another aspect of Hathor which makes her especially interesting in this discussion, apart from the musical associations, is that one of the titles by which one of her priestess musicians who was thought to embody her essence whilst playing was identified was "she who unites with the red cloth, she who sits upon her throne"⁷⁷¹. One of the symbols of Hathor appears to have been a ceremonial red cloth. This is of course intriguing considering the close associations from the Semitic examples of goddesses under red canopies and sitting upon camels in saddles. It may be tentatively suggested that what is found here is a Semitic twist on an Egyptian idea. The apparent antiquity of the qubba suggests a Semitic origin, but this may never be known.

Returning to the idea that the playing of musical instruments was perhaps a means of warding off evil it might therefore be proposed that the musical accompaniment to battle was a prophylactic measure to ensure the life sustaining actions of the deity of the tribe.

The most popular instrument in the biblical texts appears to be the tambourine, or timbrel, and this was also the instrument most usually used by the Arabian women in their battlefield activities.

⁷⁷¹ Blackman p24/25. The goddess usually identified with the red cloth is Uto, the Eye of Re', but as Hathor is also the Eye of Re' and thus Uto and Hathor are usually considered to be one in the same the identification is clear. For a specific example of Hathor being associated with the red cloth Blackman cites Rochemonteix, Edfou I 57 where she is called the mistress of the red cloth.

Along with the playing of musical instruments there appears to often have been singing. The power of the voice and words is a well known theme in Semitic theology from the earliest times. The perceived power of the spoken word has been discussed in chapter four and the ritualised poetry of the Banāt Ṭāriq has been noted above.

A.F.L. Beeston, in his paper "The So-called Harlots of the Ḥaḍramaut " discussed an extract from Ibn Ḥabīb al-Baghdādī's *Kitāb al-Muḥabbar* regarding "The Women who desired the Death of Muḥammad and their Story". In it the following was said to have happened:

When the Prophet of Allah died, the news of it was carried to the Ḥaḍramaut by a man of Kulaib, of the Banū 'Amir b. 'Auf of the Banū al-Gilah whose name was Gahbal, this family still lives in the Ḥaḍramaut at a village called Rahbah. There were in the Ḥaḍramaut six women of Kindah and of Ḥaḍramaut who were desirous of the death of the Prophet of Allah; they therefore on hearing the news dies their hands with henna and played on the tambourine. To them came out the harlots of the Ḥaḍramaut and did likewise, so that some twenty-odd women joined the six. They belonged to various villages of Ḥaḍramaut, in Tarim and Mastah and Nugair and Tin'ah and Sabwah and Damar⁷⁷².

Ibn Ḥabīb then gives the names of some of the women who were there whom he believes to be of note, then proceeds to detail the action taken by the Islamic leadership of the time which involved sending a party of men to the Ḥaḍramaut to cut off the hands of the women.

Abū Bakr wrote of these women as follows;

these (the women of Yemen) have been joined by singing girls of Kindah and prostitutes of Ḥaḍramaut and they have dyed their hands and shown joy and played on the tambourine, in defiance of Allah and in contempt of his rights and those of his Prophet.

⁷⁷² Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb al-Muḥabbar*, p184- 5.

He then ordered al-Mughira to take horses and men and go to them to strike off their hands. When he arrived with his men some of the men of the Ḥaḍramaut and Kinda intervened and tried to stop him but he was victorious. Those women whom he captured had their hands cut off, but some escaped to Kufa.

The account given by al-Ṭabarī is slightly shorter, and contains a letter written by Abū Bakr to al-Mujāhir about two singing girls involved in the mocking of Muḥammad. He wrote that al-Mujāhir's punishment on the first singing girl of pulling out her tooth and cutting off her hand was not enough and she should have been killed. However, he added to this comment that it was only a just punishment to kill the girl for mocking Muḥammad had she professed to be a Muslim, had she not then it would be too severe. He explains that to kill a non-Muslim would only generate fear⁷⁷³.

Beeston make several useful observations regarding the text⁷⁷⁴. He proposes that the women were not common prostitutes in spite of the use of the term *baghaya* as it is stated that some of them were noble women, and rightly queries why tribesmen would have rallied to their defence if they were not persons of note. His solution is that the majority were priestesses of the old religion of South Arabia, and that their singing and dancing were not merely signs of rejoicing but "an incitement to their fellow-tribesmen to rise and try to throw off the yoke of the new religion, which had deprived the pagan priests and priestesses of positions of considerable power and influence"⁷⁷⁵. His explanation of the use of the word which is

⁷⁷³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh* I p2014-5 (vol.10, p191-2 translation by Donner).

⁷⁷⁴ The majority of Beeston's interpretation of the text is based on linguistic observations and the different meanings of words in Arabic and South Arabian and how this may have had an influence on the text. Those observations he makes regarding the persons described are those which will be noted here.

⁷⁷⁵ Beeston, "The So-Called Harlots of the Ḥaḍramaut" *Oriens* 5 (1952) p20.

uncompromising in its meaning is that they were hierodules attached to the temples of South Arabia, and that this practice was likely to have been identical to that found in ancient Babylon though there is no absolute evidence that it was.

The women singing and playing tambourinés appears to be similar to the women who went to war with the tribesmen of the Hejaz and also shows commonalities with the representations of processions from Syria. However, it perhaps shows in this context something other, and that is simply joy, in the way one finds Biblical women singing songs of joy. Whilst in the Hebrew Bible, the narrative represents singing songs of joy and praise to the deity, something which may or may not have been the case here as the text does not name a god, the liturgical form of the Biblical women's song may have the same origins as the women here in the Ḥaḍramaut.

It seems that singing and music may have had some religious importance to the early Arabs. It is a mystical legend that Adam was said to have invented the flute, and it has come to be believed that the flute has a particularly profound effect on those who listen to it, indeed it is thought that the spirit of Allah passes through the instrument⁷⁷⁶. Against this there is the belief that Satan is involved in the playing of musical instruments⁷⁷⁷.

Music appears to have been most usually performed in the early Arab world by slave-girls, *qiyān*, and it seems that this idea was essentially a Bedouin

⁷⁷⁶ The full story is that Adam invented the flute when in Paradise and received a secret from Allah which he had to promise not to repeat. When exiled from Paradise it tormented him, and Gabriel came to him and advised him to bury the secret in the ground. Adam did so, and over that spot the Persian reed began to grow and it is from this reed that flutes are made. The deep effect the sound of the flute has on the listener is therefore believed to be the inheritance of Adam's secret ("Music in the Pre-Islamic Period" Shiloah, *JSAI* 7 1986 p117, citing the Berlin manuscript of the *Sukkaradan al-'ussaq wa manarat al-asma' wa'l-'amaq* of Uways al-Hamawi).

⁷⁷⁷ Shiloah, "Music in the Pre-Islamic Period" *JSAI* 7 1986 p117, citing Ibn al-Jauzī, *Tablis Iblis*.

tradition⁷⁷⁸. Usually this slave-girl was associated with sensuality and indulgence and consequent implied moral laxity⁷⁷⁹, and it may be these sorts of associations which caused the Islamic ambiguity towards music. As Ibn Khaldūn observed, the religious severity which accompanied Islam was "directed against all activities of leisure and all the things that are of no utility in one's religion or livelihood. Therefore music was avoided to some degree"⁷⁸⁰.

Dancing too appears to have had a great deal of importance in the lives of the ancient Semites. Usually it was as an expression of joy, and this could be incorporated into religious ritual. Van der Leeuw summarises the discussion of the significance of dance as follows;

... the dance is not merely an aesthetic pursuit existing side by side with other practical activities. It is the service of the god, and generates power; the rhythm of movement has a compelling force ... In the dance life is ordered to some powerful rhythm and reverts to its primeval motion and thus it is possible to attain to all manner of things 'by dancing', from ones' daily bread to heavenly bliss. There are love -, war- and hunting dances, which represent in actu the desired event, the love union, success in war and hunting⁷⁸¹.

This rather general picture of the function of dance may be taken as a general theory to be applied to all uses of dance in achieving a purpose. It may be suggested that many uses of dance not viewed as sacral may have that function depending on the purpose of that dance even if it is not stated clearly as sacred. For example, the dances performed by young women at the circumcision of a boy in order that he

⁷⁷⁸ O. Wright, "Music and Verse", p438, in *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*, from the Cambridge History of Arabic Literature series.

⁷⁷⁹ O Wright, "Music and Verse" p438 in *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*, from the Cambridge History of Arabic Literature Series.

⁷⁸⁰ Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddimah*, trans. F. Rosenthal p403.

⁷⁸¹ Van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation* 1938 .

may chose from their number a wife⁷⁸², while entirely secular on the surface may indeed be interpreted by van Leeuw's theory as minor fertility rites.

The idea that dance in a war context was part of Semitic religious practice is one considered by Oesterly who speculated that " there are some grounds for believing that the custom of which the Old Testament speaks was a remnant of what was originally a dance performed by women which had for its object the helping of the men to gain victory by means of imitative magic. In the Old Testament there is, of course, no trace of this beyond the fact that the dance was performed by women"⁷⁸³.

Considering the Biblical examples of women singing and dancing and playing musical instruments it seems that scholars make a distinction between those which were purely secular and those which were sacral.

However, while dance appears to have been part of the ritual of the Biblical women, there is no definite evidence that it was used by the women of the banāt Ṭāriq, or any other women in battle. However, while the verb *raqs* is noticeable by its absence, this may not mean that there was no dancing of any kind. For this, dance in an Arab context may be redefined. Dalman observed that for the Arabs any type of rhythmic movement of hands and feet, whether on the same spot or not, was considered dance⁷⁸⁴, and "emotions can be expressed by the rhythmic movements of the arms and of the body and of the head while the legs may be more or less motionless"⁷⁸⁵. Therefore, the absence of the verb to dance may mean that the action was implied by another verb. In the Ibn Hishām and al-Wāqidī accounts of Hind and

⁷⁸² ERE s.v. 'circumcision'.

⁷⁸³ W.O.E.Oesterly, *The Sacred Dance* p40-1.

⁷⁸⁴ Dalman, *Palestinischer Diwan* 1901 p254.

⁷⁸⁵ Oesterley p7.

the Banāt Ṭāriq, it specifically states that they stood up. The narrative may have contained this additional information with the inference that the verb *qāma* can mean they stood up with the intention of dancing. There is a precedent for this in Hebrew, where the verb *tziheq* only means to rise up, but in certain contexts it has the implied meaning of rising up to dance⁷⁸⁶.

If a pre-battle dance to assist victory was part of the Arab custom then it would most likely have been performed by these same women who appear to be performing musical rituals and chanting for their men. There are two possible reasons for performing this dance. Firstly to add to the physical excitement of the occasion and stir up courage as well as frightening the enemy and secondly there was a belief that the dance was an act of imitative magic⁷⁸⁷. The Banāt Ṭāriq seem to fulfil certain of these roles. They were certainly there to instil courage in the men. They may have been associated with the cult of Venus and thus that they were involved in imitative magic by entering into a relationship with the deity by dance is not impossible.

In ibn Khaldūn's chapter on music and the craft of singing⁷⁸⁸, he gives an anecdote which in the context of this dissertation was intriguing;

Dancing equipment consisting of robes and sticks and poems to which melodies were hummed were used. That was transformed into a special kind (of entertainment) . Other dancing equipment, called kurraj, was also used. (The kurraj) was a wooden figure (resembling) a saddled horse and is attached to robes such as women wore. (The dancers) thus give the appearance of having mounted horses. They attack each other and withdraw and compete in skill (with weapons)⁷⁸⁹.

⁷⁸⁶ Oesterley p45.

⁷⁸⁷ Oesterley p160.

⁷⁸⁸ Ibn Khaldūn, *Al-Muqaddimah*, trans. F. Rosenthal, p395-405. He begins with a description of various musical instruments popular in the Maghrib of his day, then discusses legal attitudes to the recitation of the Qur'ān in a melodic fashion and finally considers the history of music among the Arabs and Muslims.

⁷⁸⁹ Ibn Khaldūn, *Al-Muqaddimah*, trans.F. Rosenthal p404.

This anecdote, which he unhelpfully neither dates nor places in a particular region, is still a useful anecdote. It might be suggested that it is a re-enactment of historical events in dance, something which is not unknown in the Near East.

In the respect of music, here too there seems to be the same type of division between music for ritual purposes and music for joy and celebration. An example of women using music to welcome someone is that of 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb arriving in Adhri'at where he was met by the singers and tambourine players of the inhabitants⁷⁹⁰. It is unlikely that 'Umar was being met in a religious way, caliph or not. Here it seems that music was being used in a similar way to the women who rejoiced at the death of Muḥammad. While they may have had some religious function as well, in this instance it seems that they were in celebration. So in this use of music there is much room for comparison between the Biblical women and the Arab women.

The use of music, singing and dancing appear to transform a conflict from a secular confrontation to a religious event, when the secular conventions of warfare were permeated with sacral interpretation their meaning changed, "the war cry, once a signal for the engagement of humans in battle, under the influence of the concept of holy war came to be a signal for the engagement of the Divine Warrior in battle"⁷⁹¹. In addition to the actions of humans, it is also known that the presence of the Ark meant that God was engaged in the war, and it appears that it was not always brought with the warriors and on those occasions when it was, the men truly thought that God had entered their encampment⁷⁹². From the earlier description of David's statements to his warriors regarding keeping away from women it seems that there was a distinction between major and minor conflict amongst the Israelites. It appears that the case is the same here. Among the early Arabs there is an indication

⁷⁹⁰ Balādhurī, *Futūḥ* p139 (p215 in translation)

⁷⁹¹ Burns, p34

⁷⁹² See 1 Sam. 4:7

that song, music, and perhaps also dance were part of the ritual of major battles but were not part of raiding.

The *Līwa'*. The *līwa'* was the war banner of the tribe and was stored in the Dar al-Nadwa in Mecca. The office of *līwa'*, that is, the duty of carrying the *līwa'* was given by Qusayy to his son 'Abd al-Dār. That they continued to hold this office is seen from the verses recited by Hind given above when she shouted at the Banū 'Abd al-Dār to guard the *līwa'* well, as did Abū Sufyān:

On, Sons of 'Abd al-Dār!
On, protectors of our rear!
Smite with every sharpened sword!⁷⁹³

The *līwa'* appears to have been so called from the root *lāwa*, to twist or turn around and the original form of the banner was a piece of cloth twisted round a pole or spear⁷⁹⁴. Ryckmans wrote that in the Minean texts of El-Ela

il est fait un classe d'hommes et de femmes donnees en gage au temple et vous au service de la divinité. On les appelait lw' . . . une femme, nomme Mw'l est achetée par un personnage qui l'offre avec tout ce qu'elle possède à la déesse Nakrah⁷⁹⁵.

The *līwa'* and the ceremonial litter appear to have played a similar role in the tribal wars, acting as a rallying point for the warriors. The loss of either object was seen as truly disastrous for the tribe and its loss represented the end of the battle day. The *līwa'* of the Quraysh was said to have been kept in the Dār al-Nadwa. If the sources are correct and the Dār al-Nadwa was originally the house of Qusayy then it

⁷⁹³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh* I p1400 (vol. 7 p118 translation by Watt and McDonald). This is identical to the verse given in Ibn Hishām, though in the *sīra* it is spoken before those verses ascribed to the Banāt Ṭāriq (Vol. 3 p67, p374 in translation)

⁷⁹⁴ *Lisān al-'Arab l-w-*. Note the example given above of how the women were able to fool the defenders of a Persian seaport into thinking they were reinforcements by tying their veils round their lances.

⁷⁹⁵ Ryckmans p30-1

would correspond to the tent of the tribal chieftain, and from more recent sources it is known that the *ʿutfā* was kept in the tent of the chief, so too there appears to be a crossover between the two objects. The *līwaʾ* was kept in the *Dār al-Nadwa* and fell under the jurisdiction of *ʿAbd al-Dār* initially, and from the historical accounts of *Uḥud*, it certainly seems that it was still the responsibility of their number based on the statements of *Abū Sufyān* and *Hind*.

In the specific example of the *Quraysh*, it appears that both traditions were active around the time of *Muḥammad* and after. The *qubba* was taken to *Uḥud* but the *līwaʾ* was also there, as much was made of how it was passed among several people on the course of the day.

These two institutions could function together. It may have been that they were seen as entirely complimentary and there was no conflict in the combined use of the two symbols. If the two were not seen by the members of the tribe as in contradiction to each other or in competition with each other then there is no reason why they could not co-exist. It has been proposed that the *līwaʾ* was a secular symbol of the tribe and the *litter* was a religious symbol, and if this was the case, then it could neatly explain these two overlapping institutions⁷⁹⁶.

Conclusion of Chapter Six.

This chapter has shown that women not only attended to the needs of their men in war, but were there in their own right as a result of the position they held in the religious life of the period. It has been demonstrated that this was most likely in the form of attendants to the tribal deities. In this respect they may have functioned as *kāhināt*, and thus giving 'divine guidance' to the army of the tribe.

⁷⁹⁶ Morgenstern p58

It also appears that one identifiable group of such women who performed a function akin to that described above was the Banāt Ṭāriq. The *Sitz im Leben* of the Banāt Ṭāriq appears to have been liturgical rather than merely secular encouragement to bravery. The focus of their actions is not entirely clear from the sources, on the one hand they seem to be attendant on the *līwa'* or war banner, but it appears that the qubba of the goddesses Allāt and al-ʿUzzā was around at the Battle of Uḥud at least, and perhaps they may have been associated with that.

In addition to this, it also seems that a woman, sometimes attended by others, rode into battle in a ceremonial litter, evidence for which comes from both early Arab source texts and from more contemporary practices which echo those of the early Arabs. There is no doubt that these women were there in the same capacity as other women to some extent, and latterly the function of the litter borne women was to encourage the men and to give them a greater incentive to be brave in their fighting, though it may be that at some stage this was also a religious practice. The tented structure in which the young woman would sit is highly reminiscent of the qubba of the tribal idols, and indeed it seems likely that the girl in question either represented the goddess herself or she was acting as a *kāhina* of the deity.

It is also from the inclusion of women in these conflicts that the distinction between major and minor conflict in tribal warfare becomes visible. Women were not taken on raids, only to major battles where matters of honour were at stake. Thus, the women may have represented tribal honour, as Rogers said of the litter of the 'Anazy "it was regarded as the repository of valour and honour"⁷⁹⁷, but appear to have had a strong religious function in the service of the goddess. Whichever of these two functions was dominant, it appears certain that women were not present

⁷⁹⁷ Rogers, quoted by Morgenstern p10.

accidentally or without purpose, indeed their presence seems to have been a ritualised part of the act of war for the early Arab tribes.

Conclusion.

This thesis aimed to examine the roles of women during inter-tribal conflict during the period 500-650 CE from both social and religious perspectives. The first step towards achieving this was a brief re-examination of the perceived role and position of women in non-Muslim Arab society. There is some evidence to suggest that the role of women in tribal society was more significant than Islamic commentators have proposed, or indeed is suggested by a cursory overview of the ayyām narratives.

It seems that contrary to the belief that women had a low social status as Islamic commentaries suggest, they had a form of parity with the men of the tribe. Women had a high degree of self-determination in marriage and divorce, although it is also established that they contracted marriages for the benefit of the tribe by forming alliances with clients. As was noted in chapter two, female infanticide was the area which gives the greatest suggestion of women's inferiority in pagan Arab society. The most obvious interpretation of this is that girls were unwanted and thus they could be murdered in order to protect the tribe from the shame of their capture and dishonour, or as a form of demographic management. However, an equally likely scenario is that they were sacrificed, perhaps along with occasional boy children, in a religious ritual. This ritual may have been a religious prophylactic measure to stave off the ever present threat of famine and poverty. Thus if the sacrifice of daughters was a ritual practice based on appeasing the deity then they cannot have thought of them as worthless. Women were also strong supporters of tribal honour and integrity, and it is from this position of relative social power and influence that women were able to play the role they did in tribal conflict.

From this viewpoint of relative equality women were participants in tribal conflict in two main ways. They existed as tribal supporters who, by their presence and reciting of verse, exhorted the men to be brave in their defence, and by implication uphold honour. The second activity performed by women was to supply water and tend the wounded. These two social functions saw women playing an active part in tribal life in the manner most appropriate for them. As was discussed earlier, it was considered improper to kill or physically harm women, and thus they did not actively fight, except on a few rare occasions. Thus it was in these auxiliary roles that women made their significant, if less glamorous, contribution to the tribe at war.

The belief that women had a greater role in tribal life than may have been thought is further substantiated by a consideration of the religious life of Arabia. In the cults of the pagan Arabs it appears that women had an equal place with men as religious intermediaries and there does not appear to have been any appreciable difference in their activities. Both men and women acted as *kawāhin* /*kāhināt* during warfare and as such provided inspired advice for the tribe. This tradition of a representative of the cult being present with the tribe may also have been related to the perceived power of incantations. It was believed that much power was invested in words, verse in particular, and thus the intermediary, using rhymed speech, may have been able to use their powers for the benefit of the tribe by imprecating the enemy. It may be noted that in the example of Labīd verse seemed to take the place of violence as a means of conflict resolution.

In addition to their roles as intermediaries, it appears that women were present at battles in the service of the goddess Venus. The group referred to themselves as the *Banāt Ṭāriq*, or daughters of the Morning Star. In the context of

pagan Arabia, it appears that the goddess mostly associated with the Morning Star was al-'Uzzā. To find her present on the battlefield is unsurprising as she had a facet as a warrior goddess, as did her northern Semitic counterparts. As the most venerated goddess of Quraysh it is also no surprise to find her present during their major conflicts. While explicit references to this group are few, their ritual verse is found in other contexts recited by other women who do not name themselves as Banāt Ṭāriq. This implies that there was a ritual war chant which would be recited by women performing the same function.

The verse recited by these women is crucial as it demonstrates the women identifying themselves with the goddess Venus or the Morning Star thus suggesting some cultic function. The verse also refers to the threat of withholding themselves from their husbands or potential spouses should they fail to perform adequately on the battlefield. Thus the Banāt Ṭāriq may be seen as the confluence of the two ideas of honour and religion.

The dual significance of women in ritual activity during warfare may also be represented by the ceremonial litters in which they were taken to war. It seems to have been the case that the litter of a single, noble young woman was the focus of the fighting, even when accompanied by other women. In the early and modern descriptions of these women it appears that they were usually noble, beautiful and unmarried. Writing about the litter of the 'Anazy, Rogers wrote that they were the repository of honour and valour⁷⁹⁸, and as demonstrated above, these litters were so closely associated with women that any seen were assumed to contain females. This girl may thus be an obvious symbol of that which the men were required to protect, again perhaps demonstrating the value of women in society.

⁷⁹⁸ Ibid.

The litters in which the women were carried were distinctive, usually red and ornamental. This implies that they were something other than the usual litters in which women would be transported from one place to another. It appears that the origins of these ceremonial litters found in battle may lie in the qubbās of the early Arabian pagan idols. In the context of warfare, it would be likely that the deity of the tribe would be taken into battle in order to assist the tribe towards victory. In the case of the daughters of the Morning Star, it may have been that the twin goddesses al-ʿUzzā and Allāt were the goddesses taken into war, as certainly they were known to have been at Uḥud. This would not be an anomalous practice in the near east as the terracottas of Cumont described earlier testify. By riding in litters which seem highly reminiscent of sacred paraphernalia it seems that some women may have been acting in a quasi-religious capacity. It may have been the case that they rode in litters with the deities, or perhaps even represented the goddess. That an intermediary may have been seen as a physical manifestation of the divine is not unlikely, nor indeed unknown in the ancient near east. Certainly as cult intermediaries women in litters would have had some religious role, and indeed it is interesting to note that even in recent descriptions of these litters there was an element of belief in their oracle giving powers.

Thus in these litters, so intimately associated with women, there appears to be a duality of purpose. Certainly women rode in litters to encourage the men, but the potential religious significance cannot be ignored. The explanation of this ability of women to represent both honour and religion simultaneously seems plausible. It may also be that there was no conflict between the two ideas, and that the women who were there to encourage the men existed entirely separately to the women there in a religious role.

The period which has been under consideration here is one of transition, during which Islam became the dominant religion of the Arabian peninsula. It has been shown above that socially at least the roles of women in battle did not alter significantly during the life of Muḥammad or immediately thereafter. The increasing removal of women from these traditional roles may be attributed to a number of factors, though the loss of religious status for women is entirely as a result of Islamic dominance. The prohibition on *kāhināt* in the new monotheistic faith took away one of the prominent roles of women in society as a whole, and also therefore removed one of the main reasons for them to be in battle.

This said, it is perhaps ironic that the ceremonial litter, rooted in pagan practice, is the institution which still made an appearance as late as the battle of the Camel and indeed has continued into this century among the Bedouin, albeit in an Islamicised form.

It also became apparent that women were never present on minor raids, unless it was their encampment which was under attack. This indicates that raids were of less significance to the tribe and secondly that the presence of women seemed to elevate the conflict into a major event. Women were present at battles of the same magnitude as those at which the tribal deity was invoked. As well as demonstrating the difference between the raid and the battle in the attitude of the tribe, it may imply that the function of the women was on these occasions connected with the deity if they were brought on its service. This may imply that Muḥammad taking his wives on raids was an attempt to elevate the status of all conflicts in which Muslims would engage.

Thus the overall picture which emerges of women in tribal society during warfare is one in which women were equal to men, though not, it must be said,

identical. There was a high degree of gender specialisation, but these roles may not have been seen as unequal. Although women appear relatively infrequently in the ayyām literature and Islamic histories in inter-tribal conflict, it certainly seems that those roles which they filled were significant and perhaps even fundamental to the tribe at war.

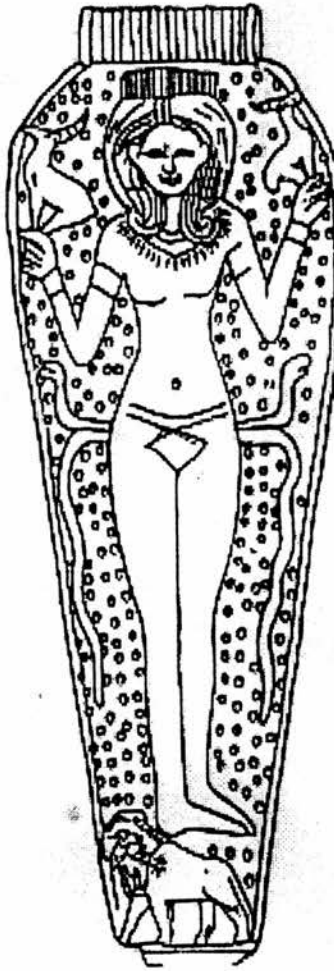


Figure I.
Gold Pendant from Minet al-Beida depicting the goddess 'Anat.
(from Day, JNES 51, 1992)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ‘Abbās, I. “Two Hitherto Unpublished Texts on Pre-Islamic Religion”
Actes du 8me congrès de l’union européenne d’arabisants et
islamisés, Aix-en-Provence (1976) pp 7-16
- Abbott, N. *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri, vol. III* Chicago 1972
- Aishah, the Beloved of Muhammad* Chicago 1942
- “Women and the State on the Eve of Islam” *AJSL* 58 (1941) pp 259-284
- “Pre-Islamic Arab Queens” *AJSL* 58 (1941) pp 1-22
- Abū al-Feda’ *Al-Tawārikh al-Qādima* published with Latin translation as *Historia Anteislamica* by H.O. Fleischer, Leipzig 1831
- Abū Dā’ūd, Sulayman ibn al-Ashath al-Sijistānī *Sunān* with English translation by
Aḥmad Ḥasan Lahore, 3 vols. (1984)
- Abu-Lughod, L. *Veiled Sentiments, Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society*
London 1986
- Abū Ṭāḥir, A. *Balāghāt al-Nisā’* Beirut 1987
- Ahmed, A.S. and Donnen, H.(eds) *Islam, Globalisation and Postmodernity*
London 1994
- Ahmed, L. *Women and Gender in Islam* London 1992
- Accad, E. *Sexuality and War* New York 1990
- Albright, W.F. “Islam and the Religions of the Ancient Orient” *JAOS* 60 (1940)
pp 283-301
- “The Evolution of the West Semitic Divinity ‘An -’Anat -’Atta”
AJSL 41 (1925) pp 117-153
- Alī, J. *Tā’rīkh al-‘Arab Qabl al-Islām* Beirut 1976 10 vols.
- Andrae, T. *Mohammed, the Man and his Faith* New York 1960
- Al-Ansarī, A.(ed.) *Studies in the History of Arabia*, vol. 3 Arabia in the Age of the
Prophet and the Four Caliphs, Riyadh 1989
- Studies in the History of Arabia*, vol.2 Pre-Islamic Arabia, Riyadh 1984
- Qaryat al-Fau: A Portrait of Pre-Islamic Civilisation in Saudi Arabia*
Riyadh 1982

Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period Cambridge History of Arabic Literature, Cambridge 1983

Arafat, W.N. "Fact and Fiction in the History of Pre-Islamic Idol Worship" *Islamic Quarterly*, 1968 pp 9-21

Arberry, A.J. *Arabic Poetry, A Primer for Students* Cambridge 1965

The Seven Odes London 1957

Al-Azraqī, Abū Wālīd Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allah *Kitāb Akhbar Makka* ed. H.F. Wustenfeld, *Geschichte und Beschreibung der Stadt Mekka*, Leipzig 1857-61 4 vols.

Archer, L.J. *Her Price is Beyond Rubies: the Jewish Woman in Graeco-Roman Palestine* Sheffield 1990

Bachofen, J.J. *Myth, Religion and Mother Right, Selected Writings of J.J. Bachofen* trans. R. Manheim London 1967

Badran, M and Cooke, M. *Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing* London 1990

Al-Baghawī, Muḥammad al-Ḥusayn b. Masūd *Tafsīr al-Baghawī* Beirut 1986 4 vols.

Al-Balādhūrī, Abū al-Ḥasan Aḥmad b. Yahya *Futūḥ al-Buldān* Cairo 1932

The Origins of the Islamic State trans. P.K. Hitti New York 1916 2 vols.

Ansāb al-Ashraf Jerusalem 1938

Barrelet, M-T. "Les Déesses Armées et Ailéés" *Syria* 32 (1955) pp 222-260

Barton, G.A. *Semitic and Hamitic Origins* London 1934

"The Semitic Istar Cult" *Hebraica* 10 (1893-4) pp 1-74

Beeston, A.F.L. "Himyarite Monotheism" *Studies in the History of Arabia* vol.2 (1984)

"The So-Called Harlots of the Ḥaḍramaut" *Oriens* 5 (1952) pp 17-22

Warfare in Ancient South Arabia Qahtan: Studies in old South Arabian Epigraphy, London 1976

Bell, R. *The Origin of Islam in its Christian Environment* London 1926

Introduction to the Qurʾān, Revised and Enlarged by W. Montgomery Watt Edinburgh 1977

Betlyon, J.W. "The Cult of ʿAserah /Elat at Sidon" *JNES* 44 (1985) pp 53-58

- Beyerlin, W. (Ed) *Near Eastern Religious Texts Relating to the Old Testament* London 1978
- Blachere, R. *Histoire de la Littérature Arabe* Paris 1952
- Black, J.A. and Green, A. *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia* London 1992
- Blackman, A. "On the Position of Women in the Ancient Egyptian Hierarchy" *JEA* 7 (1921) pp 8-30
- Bowersock, G.W. *Roman Arabia* Cambridge, Massachusetts 1983
- Boucher, E.S. *Syria as a Roman Province* Oxford 1916
- Bouhdiba, A. *Sexuality in Islam* London 1985
- Bridenthall, R. Koonz, C and Stuard, A. *Becoming Visible-Women in European History* Boston 1987
- Brilliant, M. and Aigrain, R. *Histoire des Religions* Paris 1971
- Brinker, R. *The Influence of Sanctuaries in Early Israel* Manchester 1946
- Brown, C.A. *No Longer Be Silent: First Century Jewish Portraits of Biblical Women* Louisville 1992
- Buccellati, G. *Cities and Nations of Ancient Syria* Rome 1967
- Al-Bukhārī, Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* with English translation by Dr. Muhsin Khan Ankara 1977 9 vols.
- Burckhardt, J.L. *Travels in Arabia* London 1829
- Callaghan, K.A. *Ideals of Feminine Beauty* Connecticut, 1994
- Cameron, A. and Kuhrt, A. *Images of Women in Antiquity* London 1983
- Campbell-Thompson, R. *Semitic Magic, its Origin and Development* New York 1971
- Caton-Thompson, G. *The Tombs and Moon Temple of Hureidha* London 1944
- Chaponthier, F. *Les Discourses au Service d'une Déesse* Bibliothèque des écoles Françaises d'Athènes et de Rome 1935
- Christou, C. *Potnia Theron* Thessaloniki 1968
- Cole, D.P. *Nomads of the Nomads* Chicago 1978
- Comaroff, J.L. *The Meaning of Marriage Payments* London 1980
- Condren, M. *The Serpent and the Goddess* San Francisco 1989

- Conrad, L.I. "Abraha and Muḥammad: Some Observations Apropos of Chronology and Literary Topoi in the Early Arabic Historical Tradition" *BSOAS* 50 (1987) pp 225-240
- Cook, S.A. *The Religion of Ancient Palestine in the Light of Archaeology* London 1930
- Cooke, G.A. *A Textbook of North Semitic Inscriptions* Oxford 1903
- Crawford, O.G.S. *The Eye Goddess* London 1957
- Crone, P. *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* New Jersey 1987
- Crone, P. and Cook, M. *Hagarism* Cambridge 1977
- Cumont, E. *Études Syriennes* Paris 1917
- Curtiss, S.I. *Primitive Semitic Religion Today* London 1902
- Day, P. (ed) *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* Minneapolis 1989
- "Anat: Ugarit's Mistress of Animals" *JNES* 51 (1992) pp181-190
- Deem, A. "The Goddess Anath and some Biblical Hebrew Cruces" *JSS* 23 (1978) pp 25-30
- Delcourt, M. *Hermaphroditea* Brussels 1966
- Del Olmo Lete, G. "Le Mythe de la Vierge Mère 'Anat, une nouvelle interprétation de CTA/KTU 13" *Ugarit-Forschungen* 13 (1981) pp 49-62
- De Vaux, R. *Studies in Old Testament Sacrifice* Cardiff 1964
- Dhorme, P. "La Religion Primitive des Semites" *Revue de l'Histoire de Religions* 128 (1944) pp5-27
- Doi, 'A. *Women in Sharīah* London 1989
- Sharīah: The Islamic Law* London 1984
- Donaldson, D.M. "Temporary Marriage in Islam" *Muslim World* 26 (1936) pp358-364
- Dostal, W. "Sexual Hospitality and the Problem of Matrilineality in South Arabia" *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 20 (1990) pp 17-27
- Doughty, C.M. *Travels in Arabia Deserta* London 1936 2 vols.
- Douglas, M. *Purity and Danger, an Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* London 1984

- Dussaud, R. "Les Phéniciens au Negeb et en Arabie" *Révue de l'Histoire des Religions* 108 (1933) pp 5-49
- Edwards, I.E.S. "A Relief of Qudshu-Astarte-Anath in the Winchester College Collection" *JNES* 14 (1955) pp49-51
- Ehrenfels, U.R.B. and Nainar, S.M.H. "Ambivalent Attitude to Womanhood in Islamic Society" *Islamic Culture* 25 (1951) pp. 73-88
- Eliade, M. *Images and Symbols* London 1961
- Patterns in Comparative Religion* London 1958
- Elshtain, J.B. *Women and War* Brighton 1987
- Engels, F. *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* Harmondsworth 1986
- Eph'al, I. *The Ancient Arabs - Nomads on the Borders of the Fertile Crescent* Jerusalem 1982
- Esposito, J.L. "Women's Rights in Islam" *Islamic Studies* 14 (1975) pp 99-114
- Evans-Pritchard, E.E. *Theories of Primitive Religion* Oxford 1965
- Fahd, T. *La Divination Arabe* Leiden 1966
- Farbridge, M.H. *Studies in Biblical and Semitic Symbolism* London 1923
- Faris, N. A. and Glidden, H.W. "The Development of the Meaning of Koranic Hanif" *JPOS* 19 (1939) pp 1-18
- Farnell, L.R. *Cults of the Greek States* Oxford 1909
- Fevrier, J.G. *La Religion des Palmyreniens* Paris 1931
- Finley, M. "Myth, Memory and History" *History and Theory* 4 (1965) pp281-302
- Fletcher, P.V.M. Neusner, J. and Frerichs, E. *Religion, Science and Magic in Concert and in Conflict* Oxford 1989
- Fowler, H.T. *The Origin and Growth of the Hebrew Religion* Chicago 1916
- Frymer-Kensky, T. *In the Wake of the Goddess* New York 1992
- Gad, C.J. *Ideas of Divine Rule in the Ancient East* London 1948
- Gabrieli, F. *La Poésie Religieuse de l'Ancien Islam* Paris 1974
- Gatje, H. *The Qur'an and Its Exegesis* Oxford 1997
- de Gaury, G. *Rulers of Mecca* London 1951

- Geyer, R. "Die arabischen Frauen in der Schlacht" *Mitteilungen der Anthropologischen Gesellschaft* 7 (1923) pp 148-155
- Gibb, H.A.R. "Pre-Islamic Monotheisms in Arabia" *Harvard Theological Review* 14 (1962) pp 269-280
- Girard, R. *La Violence et le Sacré* Paris 1972
- Glueck, N. *The Other Side of the Jordan* Cambridge, Massachussets 1970
- Deities and Dolphins* London 1965
- Rivers in the Desert* London 1959
- Goldziher, I. *Muslim Studies* ed. S.M Stern and translated into English by C.R. Barbu and S.M. Stern Chicago 1966-71 2 vols.
- Gordon, D.C. *Women of Algeria, an Essay on Change* Harvard Middle Eastern monographs XIX 1972
- Gray, J. *The Legacy of Canaan* Leiden 1957
- The Canaanites* Aylesbury 1964
- Gruber, M.J. *The Motherhead of God and other Stories* Atlanta 1992
- Guillaume, A. *Prophecy and Divination among the Hebrews and other Semites* London 1938
- Haas, J. (ed) *Anthropology of War* Cambridge 1990
- Haldar, A. *Associations of Cult Prophets Among the Ancient Semites* Uppsala 1945
- Hartmann, M. "Qusaij" *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und verwandte Gebiete*, 27 (1912) pp 43-49
- Hawkins, G.S. and King, D.A. "On the Orientation of the Ka'ba" *Journal for the History of Astronomy* 13 (1982) pp 102-109
- Hawting, G.R. "The Sacred Offices of Mecca from Jāhiliyya to Islam" *JSAI* 13 (1990) pp 62-84
- Haywood, R.M. *Ancient Greece and the Near East* London 1964
- Healey, J. *The Early Alphabet* London 1993
- Henninger, J. "La Société Bedouinne Ancienne" *L'Antica Società Bedouina, Studi Semitici* ed. F. Gabrieli 1959 pp 69-93
- "La Religion Bedouine Préislamique" *L'Antica Società Bedouina, Studi Semitici* ed. F. Gabrieli 1959 pp 115-140

“Über Sternkunde und Sternkult in Nord-und Zentralarabien”
Zeitschrift für Ethnologie 79 (1954) pp 83-117

Henriques, F. *Love in Action* London 1959

Hitti, P.K. *History of the Arabs* London 1970

Hodgson, M. *The Venture of Islam* vol.1 Chicago 1974

Holy, L. *Religion and Custom in a Muslim Society* Cambridge 1991

Hooke, S.H. *Middle Eastern Mythology* London 1963

Origins of Early Semitic Ritual Oxford 1938

*Myth and Ritual, Essays on the Myth and Ritual of the Hebrews in
Relation to the Culture Patterns of the Ancient East* Oxford 1933

Howard, I.K.A. “Mut’a Marriage Reconsidered in the Context of the Formal
proceedures for islamic Marriage” *JSS* 20 (1975) pp 82-92

Hourani, A. *A History of the Arab Peoples* London 1991

Hughes, T.P. *Dictionary of Islam* London 1895

Humphreys, R. Stephen *Islamic History: A Framework for Inquiry* London 1991

Hussain, F. (ed.) *Muslim Women* London 1984

Ibn al-Athīr, Izz al-Dīn *Al-Kamīl fī al-Ta’rīkh* Beirut 1899 5 vols.

Ibn Ḥabīb al-Baghdādī *Kitāb al-Muḥabbar* ed. I. Lichtenstadter Hyderabad 1945

Kitāb al-Munammaq ed. Kh. A. Fariq Hyderabad 1964

Ibn Hanbal, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad *Al-Musnad* Cairo 1951

Ibn al-Kalbī, Muḥammad *Kitāb al-Aṣnām* Cairo 1912

The Book of Idols (trans. N.A. Faris) New Jersey 1952

Ibn Khaldun *The Muqaddimah* trans. F. Rosenthal London 1958

Al-Khātib al-Tibrīzī, Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allah *Mishkat al-Masabih*
English translation by J. Robson Lahore 1972 4 vols.

Al-Isfahānī, Abū Faraj Alī b. al-Ḥusayn *Kitāb al-Aghānī* Leiden n.d.

Ibn Ishāq, Muḥammad *Sīrat Rasūl Allah* Ibn Hishām Recension, Cairo n.d.
ed. M. Al-Saqi, I. Al-Ibyari, A. Shalbi

- Life of Muḥammad* translation A. Guillaume Oxford 1996
- Ibn Manẓur, Jamāl al-Dīn *Lisān al-ʿArab* Cairo, 1307 A.H. 20 vols.
- Izutsu, T. *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qurʾān* Toronto 1966
- Jabbur, J.S. *The Bedouins and the Desert, Aspects of Nomadic Life in the Arab East* New York, 1995
- “Abū Duhūr : The Rwala ʿUṭfah” *The World of Islam, Studies in Honour of P.K. Hitti* ed. J. Kritzeck and R.B. Winder London 1959 pp 195- 198
- James, E.O. *Sacrifice and Sacrament* London 1962
- The Cult of the Mother Goddess* London 1959
- Origins of Sacrifice* London 1933
- Jarīr and al-Farazdaq *The Nakaʿid of Jarir and al-Farazdak* ed. A.A. Bevan Leiden 1905-12 3 vols.
- Jastrow, M. *The Civilisation of Babylonia and Assyria* London 1915
- Jaussen, A. *Coutumes des Arabes au Pays de Moab* Paris 1908
- Jones, A. *Early Arabic Poetry vol. 2 Select Odes* Reading 1996
- Early Arabic Poetry vol. 1 Marāthī and Ṣuʿlūk Poems* Reading 1992
- Jones, M. “Ibn Ishāq and the Dream of Atika” *BSOAS* 22 (1950) pp3-51
- Kamal, A. *The Sacred Journey* London 1961
- Kamali, M.H. “Divorce and Women’s Rights; Some Muslim Interpretations of 2:228” *Muslim World* 74 (1985) pp 85-99
- Kammerer, A. *Pétre et la Nabatene* Paris 1929
- Kandiyoti, D. *Gendering the Middle East, Emerging Perspectives* London 1996
- Keddie, N.R. and Baron B. (eds.) *Women in Middle Eastern History* London 1991
- Kinany, A.K. *The Development of Ghazal Poetry in Arabic Literature* Damascus 1945
- Kister, M.J. “The Sons of Khadija” *JSAI* 16 (1993) pp 59-95
- “On Strangers and Allies in Mecca” *JSAI* 13 (1990) pp 113-154
- “Labbayka, Allāhumma, Labbayka... on a monotheistic aspect of a Jāhiliyya Practice” *JSAI* 2 (1980) pp 33-49

- "Some Reports Concerning Mecca from Jāhiliyya to Islam"
JESHO 15 (1972) pp 60-93
- "Rajab is the Month of God" *Israel Oriental Studies* 1 (1971) pp19-223
- "Mecca and Tamim" *JSEHO* 28 (1965) pp 113-163
- "On 'Concessions' and Conduct : A Study in Early Ḥadīth "
Society and Religion from Jāhiliyya to Islam London 1980
- Kister M.J. and Plessner, M. "Notes on Caskel's Gamharat an-Nasab"
Oriens 25-6 (1976) pp 48-68
- Kruk, R. "Warrior Women in Arabic Popular Romance: Qannāṣa bint Muzāḥim and other Valiant Ladies" *JAL* 25 (1994) pp 16-33
- Lammens, H. *L'Arabie Occidentale avant l'Hegire* Beirut 1928
- Lane, E.W. *Arabic English Lexicon* London 1863
- Lecker, M. *Muslims, Jews and Pagans, Studies on Early Islamic Medina* Leiden 1995
- "A note on Early Marriage Links between Quraishis and Jewish Women"
JSAI 10 (1987) pp 17-39
- Leeuw, G. van der *Religion in Essence and Manifestation* London 1938
- Lefkowitz, M. *Women in Greek Myth* London 1986
- Lerner, G. *The Creation of Patriarchy* Oxford 1986
- van -Lennep, H.J. *Bible Lands and their Modern Customs and Manners*
London 1875
- Levy, R. *An Introduction to the Sociology of Islam* London 1931
- Lichtenstädter, I. *Women in the Ajjam al-Arab* London 1935
- Lindblom, R. *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* Oxford 1962
- Loewenstamm, S.E. "Did the Goddess Anath wear a beard and side whiskers ?"
Israel Oriental Studies 4 (1974) pp1-3
- Lyall, C.J. *Translations of Ancient Arabian Poetry* London 1885
- Lyons, M.C. *The Arabian Epic* Cambridge 1995 3 vols.
- Maier, W.A. *'Aserah: Extrabiblical Evidence* Atlanta 1986
- Maimonides *Guide for the Perplexed* London 1956

- Malti-Douglas, F. *Women's Body, Women's Word* New Jersey 1991
- Margoliouth, D.S. "The Origins of Arabic Poetry" *JRAS* 26 (1925) pp417-444
The Relations between Arabs and Israelites prior to the Rise of Islam
 London 1924
- Marmorstein, E. "The Veil in Judaism and Islam" *Journal of Jewish Studies* 5 (1954)
 pp1-11
- Al-Masūdī, Abū al-Ḥasan Alī *Murūj al-Dhahab* Beirut 1978
- May, H.G. "The Ark, A Miniature Temple" *AJSL* 52 (1936) pp 215-235
- McDonald, M.V. "Orally Transmitted Poetry in Pre-Islamic Arabia and other Pre-Literate Societies" *JAL* 9 (1978) pp14-31
- McMurray, C.W. *Stone and Pillar Cult among the Western Semites* Ann Arbor 1986
- Meeker, M.E. *Literature and Violence in North Arabia* Cambridge 1979
- Mernissi, F. *The Forgotten Queens of Islam* Cambridge 1993
- Minai, N. *Women in Islam* London 1981
- Montgomery, J.A. *Arabia and the Bible* Philadelphia, 1934
- Montgomery, J.E. "The Deserted Encampment in Ancient Arabic Poetry : A Nexus of Topical Comparisons" *JSS* 40 (1995) pp283-316
 "Dichotomy in Jāhili Poetry" *JAL* 17 (1986) pp1-20
- Mordtmann, J.H. "Dusares bei Epiphanius" *ZDMG* 29 (1875) pp99-106
- Morgenstern, J. *The Ark, the Ephod and the Tent of Meeting* New York 1945
- Morony, M. *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest* New Jersey 1984
- Moscatti, S. *Ancient Semitic Civilizations* London 1957
- Murray M.A. *Petra - the Rock City of Edom* London 1939
- Musil, A. *The Manners and Customs of the Rwala Bedouins* New York 1928
Arabia Petraea Vienna 1908
- Muslim, Abū al-Ḥusayn b. al-Hajjāj *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* Cairo n.d. 4 vols.
- Negev, A. "A Nabataean Sanctuary at Jebel Moneijah" *Israel Exploration Journal* 27 (1977) pp 219-231
- Nevo, Y.D. and Koren J. "The Origins of the Muslim Descriptions of the Jahili Meccan Sanctuary" *JNES* 49 (1990) pp 23-44

New International Version of the Bible Colorado 1984

Nicholson, R.A. *A Literary History of the Arabs* Cambridge 1930

Nielsen, D. "Der Semitische Venuskult" *ZDMG* 66 (1912) pp 469- 472

Die altarabische Mondreligion Strassburg 1904

Noldeke, T. "Der Gott 𐤊𐤍𐤁𐤁 und die Ka'ba" *Zeitschrift fur Assyrologie* 23 (1909)
pp 184-187

"Zwei goldene Kamëele als Votivgeschenke bei Arabern" *ZDMG* 38
(1884) pp 143-144

Beitrage zur Kenntniss der Poesie der Alten Araber n.p. 1864

Norris, H.T. *The Adventures of Antar* England 1980

O'Connor, M. "The Arabic Loanwords in Nabataean Aramaic" *JNES* 45 (1986)
pp213- 229

Oden, R.A. *Studies in Lucien's De Syria Dea* Harvard Semitic Monographs 1977

O'Leary, D.E. *Arabia Before Muḥammad* London 1927

Osiander, E. "Studien uber die vorislamische Religion der Araber" *ZDMG* 9 (1853)
pp 463-505

Ostriker, A.S. *Feminist Revision and the Bible* Oxford 1993

Paton, L.B. *The Early History of Syria and Palestine* London 1902

Peritz, I.J. "Women in the Ancient Hebrew Cult" *JBL* 17 (1898) pp 111-148

Peters, E.L. *The Bedouin of Cyrenaica* Cambridge 1990

Peters, F.E. *Jerusalem and Mecca: the Typology of the Holy City in the Near East*
New York 1986

The Hajj New Jersey 1994

Perron, F. *Femmes Arabes* Paris 1858

Pirenne, J. *Le Royaume Sud-Arabe de Qataban et sa Datation* Louvain 1961

de Planhol, X. *Le Monde Islamique Essai de Géographie Religieuse* Paris 1957

Pickthall, M.M. *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'ān* New York 1971

Pritchard, J.B. *Solomon and Sheba* London 1974

Ancient Near Eastern Texts New Jersey 1950

Przylnski, J. "Le Culte de la Grande Déesse" *Révue de l'Histoire des Religions* 108 (1933) pp 50-66

Puhvel, J. *Comparative Mythology* Baltimore 1987

Quale, G.R. *A History of Marriage Systems* Connecticut 1988

Rahman, F. "The Religious Situation of Mecca from the Eve of Islam up to the Hijra" *Islamic Studies* 16 (1977) pp 289-300

Robertson-Smith, W. *Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia* Cambridge 1885

Religion of the Semites: the Fundamental Institutions Edinburgh 1889

Richmond, D. *Antar and Ablā : A Bedouin Romance* London 1978

Righter, W. *Myth and Literature* London 1975

Roded, R. *Women in Islamic Biographical Collections* London 1994

Rodinson, M. *Mohammed* London 1961

Rostovtzeff, M. "Hadad and Atargatis at Palmyra" *American Journal of Archaeology* 37 (1933) pp 58-63

Caravan Cities Oxford 1932

"The Caravan Gods of Palmyra" *Journal of Roman Studies* 22 (1922) pp107-116

Rubin, U. "The Ka'ba - Aspects of its Ritual Function and Position in Pre-Islamic and Early Islamic Times" *JSAI* 8 (1986) pp97-127

"The Great Pilgrimage of Muhammad - some notes on Sura IX" *JSS* 2 (1982) pp 241-260

"Hanifiyya and Ka'ba - and inquiry into the Arabian pre-islamic background of din ibrahim" *JSAI* 13 (1990) pp 85-109

Rutter, E. *The Holy Cities of Arabia* New York 1928

Ryckmans, J. *Les Religions Arabes Preislamiques* Louvain 1951

al- Saadawi, N. *The Hidden Face of Eve* London 1980

Salahuddin, S.A. "The Role of Women in the Scientific Movement" *Studies in the History of Arabia* vol. 3 Riyadh 1989 pp 3-17

Samuel, R. and Thompson P. *The Myths We Live By* London 1990

- Sherif, M.H. "What is Hijab ?" *Muslim World* 77 (1987) pp 157-163
- Schmitt, P. (ed) *A History of Women in the West* Harvard 1992
- Schneider, D.M. and Gough, K. (eds.) *Matrilineal Kinship* Berkley 1961
- Scholem, G. "Some Sources of Jewish Arabic Demonology" *Journal of Jewish Studies* 16 (1963) pp 1-13
- Schrire, T. *Hebrew Magic Amulets* New York 1982
- Seale, M.S. *The Desert Bible* London 1974
- Seidensticker, T. "Zur Frage eines Astralkultes im Vorislamischen Arabien" *ZDMG* 136 (1986) pp 493-511
- Sells, M. *Desert Tracings* Middleton 1989
- Seltman, C. *Women in Antiquity* London 1956
- Serjeant, R.B. *South Arabian Hunt* London 1976
- "Famine Death Without Loss of Honour" *BSOAS* 50 (1987) pp527- 528
- Shahid, I. *Arabs and Byzantium in the Fifth Century* Washington D.C. 1984
- Shiloah, A. "Music in the Pre-Islamic Period as Reflected in the Arabic Writings of the First Islamic Centuries" *JSAI* 10 (1986) pp 109- 120
- Siddiqi, M.Z. *Ḥadīth Literature, its Origin, Development and Special Features* London 1993
- Soncino Chumash* London 1987
- Sowayan, S.A. *Nabati Poetry the Oral Poetry of Arabia* Berkley 1985
- Spellberg, D. "Nizam al-Mulk's Interpretation of Tradition" *Muslim World* 78 (1988) pp111-117
- Spencer, R.F. "The Arabian Matriarchate: An Old Controversy" *SJA* 8 (1952) pp478-500
- St Elle, A.M. "La Femme Du Désert Autrefois et Aujourd'hui" *Anthropos* 3 (1908) pp 181-193
- Stern, G. *Marriage in Early Islam* London 1939
- Life and Social Conditions of Women in the Primitive Islamic Community*
PhD , School of Oriental and African Studies 1937
- Stetkevych, S. *The Mute Immortals Speak* Ithaca 1993

Stowasser, B. "The Mother of the Believers in the Hadith" *Muslim World* 82 (1992) pp 1-36

Al-Ṭabarī *Ta'rikh al-Rusul wa'l- Mulūk* Leiden n.d.

The History of Al-Ṭabarī English translation, all published in Albany

vol.4 *The Ancient Kingdoms* M. Perlmann 1987

vol.6 *Muḥammad at Mecca* W.Montgomery Watt and M.V. McDonald 1988

vol.7 *The Foundation of the Community* W. Montgomery Watt and M.V. McDonald 1987

vol.8 *The Victory of Islam* M. Fishbein 1997

vol.9 *The Last Years of the Prophet* I.K. Poonawala 1990

vol.10 *The Conquest of Arabia* F.G. Donner 1993

vol.15 *The Crisis of the Early Caliphate* R. Stephen Humphrey 1990

vol.16 *The Community Divided* A. Brockett 1997

vol.19 *The Caliphate of Yazīd b. Mu'āwiyah* I.K.A. Howard 1990

L'Histoire d'al-Tabari French translation by Zotenberg, Paris, 1871 4 vols.

Jāmi' al-Bayān Cairo 1984 30 vols.

Teixidor, J. *The Pantheon of Palmyra* Leiden 1979

Al-Tibrīzī *Ten Ancient Arabic Poems* New Jersey 1965

Tornay, S. (Ed.) *Voir et Nommer les Couleurs* Nanterre 1978

Trimingham, J.S. *Christianity Among Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times* London 1979

Tutey, C.G. *Classical Arabic Poetry* London 1985

Varisco, D.M. "The Rain Periods in Pre-Islamic Arabia" *Arabica* 34 (1987) pp252-266

Vos, C.J. *Women in Old Testament Worship* Delft 1968

Waddy, C. *Women in Muslim History* London 1980

Waldman, M.R. *Towards a Theory of Historical Narrative* Columbus 1980

Ward, M.C. *A World Full of Women* Cambridge 1996

Ward, W.A. "La Déesse Nourricière D'Ugarit" *Syria* 46 (1969) pp 225-239

Watt, W.M. "Makka as the Springboard for the Call of Islam"
Studies in the History of Arabia Vol. III (1989) pp. 23-26

Early Islam Edinburgh 1990

Muhammad at Medina Oxford 1956

"Belief in a High God in Pre Islamic Mecca" *JSS* 16 (1971) pp35-40

"Pre-Islamic Religion in the Qur'ān" *Islamic Studies* 15 (1976) pp73-79

al-Wāqidī, M. *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* ed. Marsden Jones, Oxford 1966 3 vols.

Wellhausen, J. *Skizzen und Vorarbeiten - Reste Arabische Heidentums* Berlin 1887

William of Tyre *A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea* trans. E.A. Babcock and A.C. Krey New York 1943

Wilson, R.R. *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* Philadelphia 1980

Winnett, F.V. "The Daughters of Allah" *Muslim World* 30 (1940) pp113-129

Wolf, E. "The Social Organisation of Mecca and the Origins of Islam" *SJA* 7 (1951) pp 329-356

Wright, G.E. *The Bible and the Ancient Near East* London 1961

Wright, W. *Palmyra and Zenobia* London 1895

Wyatt, N. "The Anat Stela from Ugarit and its Ramifications" *Ugarit-Forschungen* 16 (1984) pp326-337

Al-Ya'qubī, Aḥmad b. 'Alī *Ta'riḫ al-Ya'qubī* Beirut 1955 7 parts in one volume

Al-Yaqūt, Abū 'Abd Allah *Mu'jām al-Buldān* ed. H.F. Wustenfeld Leipzig 1866-73 6 vols.

Young, W.C. "The Ka'ba, Gender and the Rites of Pilgrimage" *IJMES* 28 (1993) pp 285-300

al-Zamakhshari, Mahmud *Al-Khashaf haqiq al-tanzil* Beirut 197? 4 vols.

Zwettler, M. *The Oral Tradition of Classical Arabic Poetry* Columbus 1978